

The People.

VOL. VIII, NO. 2

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 1898

PRICE 2 CENTS

FIRST EDITORIAL

Establishing Precedents.

By DANIEL DE LEON

The politicians in Congress are certainly just now fulfilling an important mission. No doubt they think so themselves; but the feature of the mission they are fulfilling is that they don't understand it themselves, and that, were they to understand it, they would turn a somersault back, and radically change their attitude.

The present attitude of our Congressmen is, in an important respect, establishing a precedent for the oncoming Social Revolution.

Our Congressmen are declaring that the inhumanity of the Spanish Government towards the Cubans justifies, nay, urges us to step in and wrench the island from the clutches of Spain. In the examination of this position, the correctness or falseness of the facts on which it bases itself is of no account; neither is the sincerity or insincerity with which the facts are alleged of the slightest importance. The all-important point is that the Congressmen assert the principle that it is right, and a duty to take away the island from Spain as a result of the suffering Spanish ownership inflicts upon the Cubans.

This argument is correct. It is, however, a club that caves in the argument of "CONFISCATION" with which the very class whom these Congressmen represent seek to demonstrate the injustice of Socialism.

Socialism maintains that the ownership of the national machinery of production by the capitalist class inflicts upon the large majority of the people, the working class, such misery that it brands it inhuman. This fact no intelligent man does deny, if he is truthful, or no truthful man if he is intelligent. Socialism, then, goes further. It points out that, to redress the wrong, the instrument whereby the wrong is done must be wrenched from the capitalist class—just as now Cuba from Spain, and placed in the hands of the working class—just as Cuba in the hands of the Cubans. At this point the capitalist class rears. "There may or may not be inhuman suffering inflicted upon the

working class”, say they; “the cause of that may or may not be our ownership of the machinery of production”, they add; “but, be that as it may”, they conclude, “the Socialist plan is not to be considered because it infringes upon our vested rights, it is CONFISCATION”.

Confiscation or no confiscation, vested rights or no vested rights, and whether Congress proceeds or not to put its principle in practice by war, it has well argued in favor of, and has placed itself squarely upon a principle that the Social Revolution stands upon. Thus this Congress has, despite itself, hewn a big granite block for the foundation of the acts that the people’s representatives, carrying their mandates from the victorious Socialist Labor party, will ere long set in operation.

That system, that enables wrong to be perpetrated on the people, the people have a right and a duty to pull down; and, in the language of Thomas Skidmore, capital being like a pistol in the hand of a highwayman, it may and must be wrenched from the class that holds it, on the same principle that the pistol would be wrenched from the highwayman—whether he yells “Confiscation!” or not.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded December 2003