

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 3, NO. 306.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MAY 2, 1903.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WITH ceremonies that were pompous and impressive, both in point of display and of the scale they were enacted on, the centenary of the transfer of the “Louisiana Territory” to the United States by France was celebrated in St. Louis on the last day of last month. Magnificent as the pageant was, it is but a small part of the festivities that are to commemorate the event: these are to extend over the space of over a year, and to culminate in the most gorgeous International Exposition yet witnessed. And it is fit,—for more reasons than one.

In the first place, the Louisiana Purchase made certain the rising on this continent of a nation of first rank, overtopping all others. Not all the valuable ethnical and sociologic seeds, found on the Atlantic strip of the original thirteen colonies, would have sufficed to produce the politico-social formation of the United States of to-day. Strategic position and vast space were requisite to invite new elements, to churn them together, and finally to develop the joint possibilities of all. A new Roman Empire, overshadowing the old in might, but reared on the modern social system of production, was a prerequisite for the advance of the race. As a Roman Empire of old was a needed bridge, with a specific social mission, for the human race to cross, so an Empire of the United States of modern times was and is a condition precedent for that step onward implied in Socialism,—the international abolition of wage-slavery, of the last vestige of human slavery on earth; the international abolition of Class-Rule. The Louisiana Purchase made such a creation possible; aye, it made it certain, with all that that implied.

In the second place—and, altho’ a deduction from the first, yet a distinct feature of the event—the Louisiana Purchase illustrates the futility of statecraft when, knowingly or otherwise, it braces itself against the laws of social evolution. The Louisiana Purchase was not a “financial move” of “bankrupt Napoleonism”, as it has often been described.

Napoleon I needed money; no doubt of that. But when Jefferson, unconsciously acting in obedience to the law of American social destiny, offered him cash for the territory that spread north and south along, and deep to the west of the Mississippi, it was not at the money-bait that Napoleon snapped. Himself the unconscious tool of the capitalist social system, he was to be also the unconscious contributor towards laying the territorial foundation for the center from which the Socialist Republic was to radiate. He did not mean to, of course. He had a very different and specific purpose in mind,—the overthrow of English power. Upon signing the deed of the Louisiana Purchase, and breathing as he was wont when he had laid down the plan for one of his many invincible campaigns, he said: “I have now raised a powerful rival to England across the Atlantic; it will pull down Albion.” It is needless to pursue the thought through all its ramifications; needless to point out the extent to which Napoleon was right upon the spot; the extent to which he was later in error; and the extent to which, in the not yet realized future, he will be both right and wrong,—the hated Albion, together with his beloved France, both going down jointly in that for which he and they strove, and both re-rising in the splendor of the New Era, blazoned into existence from that world’s beacon that has the Louisiana Purchase as a cornerstone in its masonry.

No pageantry, however gorgeous; no outbursts of eloquence, however thrilling can render excess of homage to the Louisiana Purchase.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2006