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EDITORIAL

THE PROCONSUL LOOMING UP.

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A CERTAIN bill has made its appearance in Congress that deserves all the opposition, and much more bitterness than it is evoking. It is the bill to provide for the government of the Canal Zone. It is so unique a bill that it may be called revolutionary—not, however, revolutionary forward, but revolutionary backward. Indeed, the Proconsulship of old Roman despotism peeps through the folds of the bill.

Hitherto, all legislation concerning the government of United States Territories was cast in the mold of the Constitution. Seeing the Constitution guarantees a republican form of government to the land, republican in form was every step taken and measure adopted for the administration of a Territory. The present bill ignores each and every precedent on the subject. It vests in the President the power to appoint, not merely a governor of the Zone, but a governor with legislative authority, and not even with legislative authority limited to rightful subjects of legislation, but absolute and unqualified. The President's appointee would, accordingly, be an autocrat: from him would emanate laws, decisions upon the same, and he would execute them. He would be Executive, Legislative and Judicial, besides Administrative, all in one, restricted by no national precedents, and responsible to the President alone, from whom all his powers emanate.

In the days of old Roman despotism a Proconsul was appointed over whatever province was to be "pacified." As he was the source of all law in the province, the people therein were at his mercy—they and their property. As a consequence, Proconsuls usually returned home scandalously rich. The Proconsul had no power over Rome herself and her immediate territory. Nevertheless, the effect of the Proconsular system was one that the legal system at home could not and did not survive. The virus reacted homeward; the effect intensified the case; and Rome went

whither history tells us.

The proposition for what amounts to a proconsulship on the Canal Zone is something thicker than the thin edge of the wedge. Already at home gigantic corporations are drawing the government more and more under their own thumbs, and turning their private offices into actual legislative halls. A Proconsul in Panama spells Revolution with the biggest R. in the case, standing at the same time for Reaction.

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