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FIRST EDITORIAL

“STARTING RIGHT.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

Cuba, it is said, is being put into condition for “self-government.” This is the explanation given for the continuance of the American forces there, and the existence of the military government this country is imposing upon its ward. Nevertheless, one thing and another is coming to light that raises the suspicion of a very different game being in the wind.

Strikes have been breaking out in several places, notably Havana. As fast as they break out they are being suppressed by the military. This would be in keeping with what one is familiar with here. The armed forces of the Government have been active mainly in keeping Brother Labor down and Brother Capital up. But the conduct of the military in the recent struggles of labor in Cuba has gone beyond anything yet done here. In Havana, Gen. Ludlow, the military commander of the city, not only promptly arrested the leaders and kept them lodged in jail, but refused to liberate them until THEY HAD PROMISED TO ABANDON AGITATION. This goes even beyond the recent Idaho experience; it denotes

“Liberator”—And Strike Breaker.



Major General of Volunteers William Ludlow (1843–1901) was U.S. military governor of the city and department of Havana, Cuba, from September 1898 until April 1900.

a more comprehensive scheme than than the mere benevolent one of educating the recent Spanish colony in the gentle art of self-government. It denotes that American capital, unable to “invest” here, owing to America already being too much dog-in-the-mangered, and having sought in Cuba for better opportunities, is seeking to “start right.”

When the capitalist class starts in its original start, it starts as the most revolutionary thing agoing. Freedom of the freest, humanity of the broadest are its slogans. To the tune of them it overthrows its former master, Feudalism; it uproots institutions; it cuts off heads. It sticks at nothing. Anything that stands in the way must go, and does go. Its slogans are not merely declamation. While they are not honestly meant, they are very deliberately adopted: they are needed for success, they are needed to accomplish the tearing down: the propertyless, the proletariat, has to be intoxicated with enthusiasm for the arduous task of planing and smoothing down the path for the capitalist class. That, once done, the capitalist class has no more use for its slogans; indeed, these become troublesome. Fain would the capitalist class roll up the slogans of its revolutionary days, like battle flags are rolled up and put away after war is over. But the thing cannot be done in a day. In the meantime, the proletariat, its head still full with the slogans of old, and still taking these seriously, makes demands, strikes attitudes. These demands and attitudes bother Messrs. Capitalists; they resist; the Proletariat pushes; the class struggle starts. The history of this struggle is not alike everywhere. In countries where the blight of British “pure and simpledom” has not taken root, the struggle ripens speedily and the lines are drawn sharp; and the issue, foreshadowing the oncoming revolution next in line, is promptly discerned. In other countries the struggle is more long drawn, but eventually “gets there” all the same. Thus it is happening in America now.

The difficulties that are in the path of capital here, capital is seeking to escape in Cuba. There a new field opens where the tremendous surplus, uninvestible here, may be invested with grand prospects. But in doing so, the start is to be made right. A hundred and odd years ago, infant itself, capital had to cultivate the germ that was to grow into that “nuisance” of a labor movement in America. Capital is now no longer infant. It needs no slogans to get upon its feet. The “nuisance” can be removed from the start—and they ARE removing it, at least doing their best in that direction. Hence the agitators in Cuba are put in jail and kept there until they promise to desist.

Let them promise. The revolution will only have one more bond to snap. The revolution that cannot snap all is none.

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

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