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EDITORIAL

## THE HISTORIC SIDE OF EXPANSION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

It has been pointed out that the vast region of Asia, the Pacific Islands, the West Indies, Africa, and South America have millions and millions of inhabitants whom we might supply with goods. The factories and the mills could be kept running at all times, and as a consequence, work would be assured to all.

In order to reach this ideal state it is necessary to extend our “sphere of influence,” and not only open the different lands to our goods, but also to hold them against all comers. American trade moved slowly, while British, German, and French trade penetrated into many lands, and the merchants of these pushing and aggressive countries grew rich and powerful. The Englishman in India, South Africa, and China was the envy of all American merchants, and from a cursory examination of the extension of trade, it became evident that the only way in which it could be gained was by conquest, and then educating the natives of the conquered country up to the need for our goods.

The movement towards the forcible extension of trade was delayed by the uncertainty existing in the sections of the world desired, and by the known repugnance of the people of the United States to interference with the policy of other nations. There was also a lurking fear that if the attempt was made too soon, it might miscarry through the lack of support on the part of the country, and because of the opening a futile move would give for agitation against a continuation of the attempt to seize, for commercial purposes, territory far removed from our own.

The desire for the accomplishment of this set purpose, however, while it was not at once fulfilled, remained, and continued to grow stronger. The product of the factories as at present owned and controlled, could not be restrained within the confines of the United States. The method of production had eaten like a cancer into our social life, and unless further food was given to it, death must result to the body upon which it now feeds.

There is no possibility of stopping production, unless we resort to violent and

artificial methods. The shutdown and the strike forced upon the working class, make it restive and dangerous. The strike and the shutdown also throw out of business hundreds of medium-sized plants precarious in the extreme. The continuation of the capitalist system depends greatly on its power to extend the limit of its influence. It is entrenched on this continent, and it rules absolutely every man and woman here. But it could not stop there. It must seek an outlet for the goods which the capitalist class holds by right of the crime it commits, or it must face ruin.

The long desired opportunity came when the war between Spain and her provinces broke out. The United States Government, that is the government of the capitalist class, took advantage of the situation, and forced upon a weaker nation, a nation already tottering towards dependency upon some other nation, a nation which has fallen from a position of power and affluence, a war for which it was ill-prepared, and the outcome of which could never be doubted. There were a great many dastardly acts on the part of this Government, and the least of them was by no means the seizure of the mail of the then Spanish ambassador. The contents of one letter touched the match to the powder, and soon the whole country was clamoring for war which would end forever Spanish rule in the New World, and give to Cuba and Porto Rico the freedom which they had long sought, and which the would-be donators themselves did not possess.

The war was speedily initiated, fought, and won. There were many scandals, but the American people have the bad habit of forgetting, and the gross violations of all laws, the swindling in the commissariat, the abuse and neglect of the soldiers, and the connivance of the administration in all this abuse and robbery, soon passed as a tale that is so old and shadowy that it is but a dim recollection.

Cuba and Porto Rico were the objective points in the minds of most citizens, but the declaration of war was scarcely passed when the nation awoke to find that the fleet in the Chinese waters had been hurried to the Philippines, and that the Islands had fallen into our hands without trouble.

The humanitarian aspect of the struggle was immediately overlooked. We must “protect” the newly acquired islands. We must see that there is no interference with their progress. We must give to them a stable government. We did all those things, and then we learned that it was our “manifest destiny” to “expand,” and that while we were helping a weak people to gain their independence, we were even then expanding.

From exalted talk about the blessings of liberty, and how the United States would extend a hand to our striving neighbors, we now have trade reports which dilate at length upon the marvelous increase of exports to those neighbors, and long recitals of the advantages which accrue to us through holding them.

The filching of this territory from Spain was but the first act in the drama. We entered heart and soul into the division of China, and for a mythical report of the slaughter of missionaries, we hurried our armies across the Pacific, and we still retain them there.

Statesmen fought as long as they could against any intervention in the affairs of the Far East, but statesmen are powerless when the economic system which they advocate, defend, and strive to perpetuate, is developing along its logical lines. We could not hold away from China, because we have reached a point where we must expand or the whole edifice of capitalism must go down.

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

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