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EDITORIAL

IMPEACH MCKINLEY!

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The capitalist press of the country, of all shades of capitalism—Democratic as well as Republican, Silver as well as Gold-Bug, Protection as well as Free Trade,—has, during the last two weeks, been editorializing and reportorializing at a wondrous rate on the subject of “contraband of war,” apropos of the seizure of certain American cargoes by British men-of-war. These articles are written in such a way that, the more of them the public reads, the less is it able to understand the subject:—and that is the purpose of the writers; and deep is the meaning thereof.

The subject of “contraband of war” is not the tangled subject that it is attempted to make it appear; least of all is it tangled in the present instance. It is plain, easy to understand under all circumstances; and especially plain is it in this case.

“Contraband of war” is the name given to goods in transit, the acquisition of which would strengthen the fighting arm of a belligerent. It follows from this simple and unquestionably correct definition, that, in order to determine whether an article in transit is “contraband of war,” the first thing to ascertain is whether the article is consigned to a belligerent or not. If it is, even then the article may not fall within the category of “contraband of war”; gold bangles for women, toys for children, consigned to a belligerent, would, self-evidently, not be articles of a nature to strengthen the belligerent’s fighting arm; on the other hand, the otherwise innocent articles of food might, under given conditions, fully fall within the category of “contraband of war,” inasmuch as they might be used to sustain the fighting arm of a belligerent. Clear enough, in all these cases, very delicate and fine questions of fact, covering a wide range of military tactics and social conditions, might arise, giving ample scope to discussion; and the seizure of such goods by one of the belligerents would be justified, subject to subsequent adjudications. But it is

equally clear that no such questions or discussions can at all arise if the articles in question are not consigned to a belligerent. Cannon balls, for instance, are unquestionable articles of warfare, the possession of which adds material power to military operations; yet cannon balls, shipped by one neutral to another, can under no circumstances be construed to be “contraband of war”; the seizure of such goods by one of the belligerents is an unqualified act of piracy—unless tolerated by the neutral from whose shore it is shipped and by the neutral to whose shore it is consigned; and in such case, both such nations strip themselves of neutrality, and rank themselves as belligerent allies of the belligerent that makes the seizure.

These being the irrefutable principles, what are the facts in the case?

England and the Transvaal are just now belligerents. Pending this war, three vessels laden with American provisions, left the neutral port of New York, consigned to the neutral port of Lorenzo Marquez, in Delagoa Bay, a Portuguese possession, and were seized by British men-of-war on the allegation that, as Delagoa Bay borders on the Transvaal, the belligerent Transvaal might, could or would provision itself on that Portuguese territory.

The fact that both Lorenzo Marquez, the destination of the goods, and New York, the place of shipment, are neutral ports, throws the goods without further discussion, out of the category of “contraband of war”; the further fact that both the McKinley Administration and the Portuguese Government winked at the seizure, have, in fact, under cover of “inquiring,” justified them, is tantamount to a declaration of war by both against the Transvaal, a declaration of war under conditions, at that, that place the United States and Portugal in a subaltern position in the ranks of the belligerent England.

And these are the simple facts and principles which the variegated capitalist press is, in chorus, trying the scuttlefish game on, by seeking to confuse the public mind with the aid of labored dissertations, together with finespun theories and quotations from treaties and books on international law, on what is, what is not, and what might, could or would be “contraband of war,”—but never the essential points that alone would clarify the whole question.

We are not here concerned with Portugal; nevertheless, virtually dependent of England as Portugal is, this country’s ranking itself alongside of Portugal as a British subaltern ally may serve to help illumine the situation.

The United States can declare war only by action of Congress; Congress has not uttered a word. By the action of McKinley alone, the nation becomes a belligerent,

and a belligerent lackey, at that; and yet Congress is silent.

The capitalist class of America, with its gold- and its silver-bug heiresses intermarried with the rowdy British nobility, is just now exemplifying its Benedict Arnold character. Its Republican Executive sells out the country, and its Democratic Congressmen sit silently by emphasizing their silence by rhodomontade speeches in favor of “the embattled farmers of the Transvaal, struggling for freedom,” yet not once uttering the one word that fits the occasion:

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

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