

EDITORIAL

THE WAR DEPARTMENT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHEN the corporation lawyer, **Elihu Root**, was appointed Secretary of War, many a simpleton wondered. How could a man of his sort, unquestionably well versed in “legislation” and all the capitalist trickery that this word implies, but utterly lacking in technical knowledge of military affairs,



ELIHU ROOT (1845–1937)

undertake to fill such a position? How could he be trusted in it for a moment, at the very time when the special object in view was the creation of a vast military establishment—not temporary, as had been the case a generation ago, but permanent—and the consequent lifting of the War Department into first place among the gigantic executive organs of the American republic? And what had war to do with corporations, anyhow?

These questions would hardly be asked now by any man of sense. They were never asked, in fact, but by persons of very limited understanding, who cannot even now read as they run the blood-red answers projected on the wall by the events themselves at every step in the unrolling of our capitalist policy.

Root, indeed, was of the sort that fitted exactly the circumstances of his advent. During the war with Spain, he would no doubt have been out of place in his present office, although no worse than “General” Alger, of embalming fame. But after the war, a corporation attorney of the Root standard was a necessity of the situation.

It is by the War Department that our colonial empire is to be governed. The laws which Congress may from time to time enact in this connection will be of a most general character. They will be intended to clothe the Executive with unlimited and arbitrary powers of administration, while preserving a mere appearance of congressional sovereignty. In every concrete case—such as the granting of franchises to thieving capitalists, the distribution of natural wealth and

fat carrion among corporate buzzards, the conditions under which certain industries will be carried on by exploiters of “uncivilized” labor, etc.—the War Department will use its intelligent discretion, “with due regard, of course, to the best interests of the people of the United States and of modern civilization in its highest form.”

It goes without saying that Cuba, to whom political independence is to be given—in accordance with a certain congressional resolution—as soon as her people, under the care and teachings of our own administration, shall have attained the degree of political intelligence and honesty necessary to secure her tranquility and welfare, will in the meantime remain subject to our colonial regime. Under that regime, so attached will she soon be to our great republic, so indissolubly united to it, so swallowed up, as it were, by our capitalism, that when the day comes to play the farce of a popular vote on political independence, she will beg on her knees to remain in name what she will be in fact, a “possession” of the United States, inhabited by wage slaves, bred in ignorance and misery, and kept in terror by American bayonets.

And who but a man of the Root calibre could so judiciously exercise the tremendous powers thus unexpectedly conferred by our “manifest destiny” upon our War Department? Aye, who could better direct the army against any “domestic enemy”? A mere soldier, unless he be a Gallifet, might under certain circumstances show some hesitancy, some mercy, perhaps; a great corporation attorney—never!

As to the organization of the army itself, that is, indeed, the work of a soldier. But, as under the trust system each industry is conducted by technical men, responsible for the cost, quantity, quality and value of the product to a trust magnate, in whom are vested the powers of his associates, so under a fully evolved capitalist government the army, the police, the bench and every branch of the public administration, are directed by special men, responsible for the efficiency of their respective services to a trusted politician, in whom are vested the powers of the capitalist class.

There is, however, a “manifest destiny” which the prophets of that class cannot yet perceive: the manifest destiny of the working class, under the banner of the S.L.P.

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

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