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FIRST EDITORIAL

Shall Cuba Be Free?

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From the battle fields of Camaguey comes the cry for moral and physical assistance to the Cubans in arms against Spain, and a manifesto has reached this office, headed by the question: “Shall Cuba be Free?”

A hundred, nay, fifty years ago one should not have hesitated to answer; even as late as twenty years ago, our answer would have been a prompt and emphatic “YES.”

Experience, however, written with the blood of the “freed” in all continents, the American continent in particular, causes us to pause, and, before answering, ask the question, “What do you mean by ‘freedom?’”

If by “freedom” is meant the freedom of the Cuban toiler from subjection to the thrall of any human being in the pursuit of his living; if it means his freedom to hold and enjoy the full fruits of his efforts without the compulsion to pay tribute to others for the boon of life; then say we “CERTAINLY!”

If, on the other hand, by “freedom” is meant the freedom of the Cuban from the thrall of the Spaniard, but his subjection to the thrall of the Cubans; if it means freedom from the necessity of paying tribute to Spain, together with the moral bondage that entails, but leaving extant the conditions under which the workers of Cuba would be compelled to pay tribute to Cubans and undergo the moral degradation of such vassalage; then “freedom” would be tantamount to a transfer of bondage, to a change of masters; then the game would not be worth the candle; then say we: “QUIT YOUR FARCE; YOU SHALL NOT DECEIVE US; WE REFUSE OUR AID!”

What distinguishes man from the brute is that, in knowledge, his age is not gauged by his years. The living to-day are centuries old. The recorded experience of all ages that preceded us is ours. He who to-day claims to stand up for “freedom” must know its history; he must be equipped with the experience of preceding generations that

“freedom from foreign nations,” once believed to insure absolute freedom to the peoples thus freed, has shown itself to be a lie; that “domestic” tyrants are no better than “foreign” ones; that the tyrant of the world’s proletariat is an international power—CAPITALISM—that, so long as it is allowed to stand, it is the residuary legatee of whatever other tyrant may be overthrown; and that, consequently, all efforts to overthrow these are efforts essentially thrown away.

The present Cuban “patriots,” so-called, have not the excuse of their predecessors, the patriots who throughout the American continent sought the freedom of man in America through the freedom of America from Europe. What our older patriots were ignorant of in their days, the Cuban patriots of to-day must be aware of. These have the palpitating proofs before their eyes; from Maine down to Patagonia, they behold nations “free” from Europe, but peopled with populations of wage slaves, held to a servitude such as the “foreigner” had never dreamed to establish; the proof glares them in the eyes. What the older patriots of America cannot be blamed for not having foreseen, the Cuban patriot of to-day cannot be pardoned for ignoring. The cry for “freedom” cannot, may not, in our days be simply the cry for the freedom of one nation from another; it is a false cry if it fails to demand the overthrow of wage slavery and thereby freedom from capitalism.

Nineteenth century civilization expects of the Cuban revolutionists, if animated by the purity they claim and equipped with the knowledge essential to success, that they unfurl the banner of freedom from the capitalist rule; if they do not, they prove themselves either incompetent, or political deceivers trying to catch the people with a snare and a delusion, in either of which cases, so far from being entitled to our aid, they are entitled to our condemnation.

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

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