

EDITORIAL

NEUTRAL GROUND.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHICHEVER way one looks at the Pouren case the conclusion can not be escaped that all the practices of civilized nations combine in damning the conduct of the Czar's Government for demanding the extradition of Jan Janoff Pouren; combine in damning the action of Commissioner Shields for holding Pouren, and combine in warning the higher authorities that this outrage has gone far enough.

There is no question about the nature of Pouren's "offence" in Russia. Whatever the Russian Government may claim, and its lawyers the Conderts¹ may repeat for pay, the very Russian documents in the case prove that Pouren fought the Czar arms in hand during the recent revolution. The associates of Pouren who were captured were not tried like common felons and hanged, they were court-martialed and shot. Pouren, accordingly, is a defeated combatant. How are defeated combatants treated by civilized nations into whose territory they flee?

Numerous events in the recent Russo-Japanese war answer the question. Wherever the Russian fleets met the Japanese the Russians were routed, culminating with the great naval battle of the Sea of Japan. The ships that were not sunk or captured, and which could not reach a friendly port, made full steam to the nearest available neutral port. Once there they were safe from pursuit, provided they dismantled themselves and therefore offered a guarantee that they would take no further part in the conflict. There were some thirty-six such "interned" Russian ships of war when hostilities ceased; and when the treaty of Portsmouth was signed the disposal of these ships lay, not with the Governments in whose territory they took shelter; it lay with their own Government itself.

¹ [This probably an error. "Couderts," alluding to a family of New York attorneys and politicians, probably intended.—R.B.]

When Pouren arrived in America he was not even armed; no army or navy was in hot pursuit of him as was the case with the interned ships of Russia. A defeated combatant, he hurried to our shores, found shelter here, and settled down to earn his living.

It never occurred to Japan to place upon the Governments of the neutral ports, to which the Russian ships of war worsted in battle fled for asylum, the insult of demanding the surrender of the ships. Russia has dared to insult the Government of the United States by demanding the surrender of a defeated soldier who fled unarmed to the altars of our national independence.

There is but one answer to such a demand: "No! We are not barbarians; neither are we fools to be tricked with false pretence!"

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

Uploaded March 2010

slpns@slp.org