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EDITORIAL

AN OMINOUS PHENOMENON.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE most important portion of Roosevelt's speech delivered on the Boston Common on August 18 was that part that dealt with the Panama Canal.

The essential facts in the case are that, by treaty, the United States was made the guarantor of the integrity of the territory of the republic of Colombia. The negotiations between Washington and Bogota for the cutting of the Canal made no progress. Possibly, even probably, the Government of Colombia was "holding the U.S. up," and thus planted itself across the path of a great and needed improvement. Under the circumstance the course dictated by self-respect and by respect for international comity was for the Government at Washington to abrogate the treaty with Colombia, and, its arm then being free, take military possession. What the administration of President Roosevelt did was, under the plea of "guaranteeing the integrity of Colombian territory," to conspire with the Panamaians, help these with marines to tear Panama from Colombia, and then appropriate the Canal Zone. This was an act of brigandage, cynical and unscrupulous. It was political banditism of the swaggering variety. Now, then, referring to that affair Roosevelt said on the Boston Common:

"If I had wanted to avoid trouble—I never hunt trouble, but I don't avoid it if it comes my way (applause)—I could have done one of two things: if I had wished to avoid trouble I would have made a masterly report to Congress and Congress would have held a series of able debates on the masterly report and we would have had half a century of more conversation. (Applause and laughter.) And the canal would be 50 years off now.

"Instead of doing that I took the zone and started the canal. (Applause.) And I allowed Congress, instead of debating the canal, which would have been a misfortune, to debate me (laughter), which didn't make any difference to anybody, and least of all to me. (Laughter.) And in consequence of that we came to a fair working compromise.

"We got the canal and Congress got the debate. (Laughter.) And the

debate about me is still going fitfully on, and I think it won't close until long after I am dead (laughter) and the canal will be finished in another year! (Applause and cheers.)”

The brutal, swaggering cynicism of these words add nothing, or very little to the story. Their significance lies in the reception that they received—applause, laughter and cheers from a gaping multitude said to have numbered 10,000 people.

No Napoleon the Little, or other Despot, falls from the skies. He is a product of conditions. To every Despot there must be hundreds of Despot-worshippers. The most significant, as it is among the most ominous of the signs of the times, was the phenomenon of a mob 10,000 strong applauding and cheering a braggart law breaker, and laughing at the degree of nullity to which he degraded Congress, the legislative arm of the Nation, and to which Congress allowed itself to be reduced.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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slpns@slp.org