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EDITORIAL

“VENEZUELAN DISORDERS.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**T**he important thing,” so runs a wise maxim, “is not to find unlikeness in things seemingly alike, but to detect the likeness in things seemingly unlike.” What more unlike, one should say, than Venezuelan asphalt, South African Rand mines, missionaries in China or American exports in the Philippines? These, certainly, are as unlike as unlike can be, and, consequently, the disturbances that arise in connection with them seem to have no common point of contact, except such as may be pointed out by pulpiteers in their pulpits,—“human depravity,” as manifested by the Filipinos in refusing to accept America’s theory of “manifest destiny,” or as manifested by the Chinese in resisting the religion of the Krupp cannon, or as manifested by the Boers in mistrusting Cecil Rhodes as a Prince of Peace, or as now manifested by the Venezuelans in “kicking up a rumpus.” Nevertheless, these geographically widely separate, and chemically widely different matters are closely connected; they are all near relatives; they are children of identical parentage. The mouse and the elephant look very different, yet they are of one family. As important in natural history as is the anatomic fact that connects mouse and elephant, is in social science the perception of the fact that “Venezuelan disorders,” “Boer wars,” “Filipino rebellions,” “Chinese heathenism” are all products of one central cause.

More than once has Dunning’s terse expression been produced in these columns; it cannot be reproduced too often. He said:

“Capital is said to fly turbulence and strife, and to be timid, which is very true; but this is very incompletely stating the question. Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum. With adequate profit capital is very bold. A certain 10 per cent. will insure its employment everywhere; 20 per cent. certain, will produce eagerness; 50 per cent., positive audacity; 100 per cent. will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent., and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If

turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both.”¹

With the key of this masterly generalization, founded on facts gathered from all nations, creeds and races, the myth of “human depravity” vanishes and the mystery of “disorders” becomes plain terms.

In Venezuela, two corporations claim conflicting jurisdiction granted to them over a certain asphalt lake situated in the Orient of the republic. Thereupon both armed their employees. Physical clashes were threatened, when the Government in Caracas stepped in. One of the corporations is owned mainly by natives; the other is owned mainly by United States capitalists. The action of the Venezuelan Government was “resented” by the latter corporation, altho’ its charter places it wholly within Venezuelan jurisdiction. Thereupon a United States ship-of-war is speedily converted into a passenger steamer for the benefit of the attorney and others of the American asphalt corporation; they are landed in Venezuela; and within four times twenty-four hours a “revolution” breaks out there, and our plutocratic press forthwith blossoms into “Disorders in Venezuela.”

The magnitude, that these latest “Venezuelan disorders” will assume, could be accurately predicted now if the Asphalt Company—that with one hand inveigles American workingmen to work for it at starvation wages in its Venezuelan asphalt lake, and with the other dictates the orders to the American Navy and plutocratic press—were frank enough to let out the magnitude of the per cent. of profit that is at stake in the asphalt lake. If it is only a 20 per cent., the “disorder” will not rise above a few hundred human beings killed and a few Venezuelan homes being desolated. If, however, the per cent. at stake is bigger, then may we look for greater things: if it be 100 per cent., human laws will be trampled under foot; and if, unfortunately for this country and Venezuela alike, it be 300 per cent., then may we look forward to wholesale crime: the wholesale sacrificing of our American soldiers, as is now going on in the Philippines, and the wholesale desolation of the now smiling valleys of the lower Orinoco.

Fortunately for us and for “disorderly” Venezuela, a 300 per cent. or even a 100 per cent. profit is not among the virtues of the asphalt lake in question.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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¹ [T.J. Dunning, *Trade Unions and Strikes: Their Philosophy and Intentions*. London, 1860, pp 35–36.]