

EDITORIAL

“TRICK-WINDOWS” AND “FACES.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THREE naval officers of the United States cruiser *Chicago*, lying in the port of Venice, went ashore; got drunk, boisterous and riotous; upset tables in several cafes, smashed sundry windows, and assailed and severely cut the faces of several people; were arrested by the Venice police, brought up before the San Marco Court on the 27th, and sentenced to four and three months' imprisonment, besides fined in costs and damages. This is the story, plain and short, and quite lucid, withal.

Immediately thereupon the official friends of the rowdies in Washington rushed to the press with apologies for their mess-mates. In fact the apologies amount to speaking the rowdies of the cruiser *Chicago* free, and throwing the blame upon their victims. This is the way they do it:

“The offense of upsetting a table is pretty common in all Mediterranean ports. It is notorious that in all those ports every cafe which is much frequented by sailors is equipped with one or two trick tables, and the man who has not been victimized by one of them is fortunate. It is an easy means of blackmail.

“A table of this kind is worked with a lever, and is so made that a slight pressure upon the lever will upset the table in the most natural way. A waiter keeps an eye on the party which he intends to victimize, and waits until the proper moment, which is when the table is pretty well covered with glassware. Then he approaches ‘to see if the gentlemen want anything,’ and contrives to press the lever. In a moment the table is upset and all the glassware smashed. The proprietor then makes his appearance, in a state of indignation, charges the sailors with being intoxicated, and demands an exorbitant price for the broken glasses. The probability is that the foreigners pay the exorbitant price in order to avoid trouble. If they do not pay, the police are called in.”

In other words, the windows that were smashed were “trick-windows,” the faces that were cut were “trick faces.”

Such are the flowers that blossom on the tree of Imperialism. The conduct of the men in the Army and Navy has undergone a marked change since the late Spanish war. Formerly these men behaved decently when off duty; now they are a menace to whatever place they are let loose in. We have seen them in this very country bully pedestrians, assail women, throw a whole village into a panic. Is it to be expected they will behave better abroad?

The Spanish war was the kinder-garten for these folks; the invasion of the Philippines has been the Academy. The water-cure has been a sort of “post-graduate course.” This little riot in Venice is merely a “side course,” attended to by the tutor-assistant of a regular professor. And the end is not yet.

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

Uploaded September 2006