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EDITORIAL

A BELATED ROMAN EMPIRE?

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE news that has been pouring in of late both from our “dependencies” and from our national capital has a queer, old, musty flavor about it, a flavor of the olden days when the Roman Empire was being shaken from center to circumference by turbulence.

From the antipodes, in far off Philippines, “drastic measures” are reported as having become necessary to “repress disorder”; from our nearer dependency, Puerto Rico, news comes that an American teacher, being thought too severe in his disciplinary measures, was hooted by a crowd of natives, whereupon they were dispersed at the mouth of the cannon hurriedly wheeled into line by an American company of artillery; and simultaneously with that comes the news of the riotous conduct of the military in Washington that participated in the inauguration pageantry. These soldiers looted shops, maltreated pedestrians, insulted women, in short, indulged in all the wanton acts that armed ruffians have ever indulged in, whenever they felt that they were part of a Government based on brutality.

A decidedly musty Roman Empire flavor all this has. When Rome had beaten down the nations near and far with the mailed hand of her legions, a fruit of her conquests was the effrontery of her military at home as much as abroad. Abroad, eternal commotions prevailed; at home the people were cowed by the swagger of the centurions. The military having become the right arm of the Empire, the pivot upon which rule turned, Militarism with all the accompaniments of reckless brutality, became the national stamp. From Caesar down all that there was of real government was organized force.

We are not there yet. But coming events cast their shadows before them. Similar causes will produce similar results, qualified only by changed circumstances. Clear, however, are the outlines being defined of the direction our ruling class is developing into. A stove-piped, Sunday-school-smirked Caesar McKinley may yet be a Twentieth Century companion piece for a tiara-rigged and

Isis-worshipping **Caesar Elagabalus**¹ of old,—both the apex of armed, organized, and liveried brigandage.

The Roman Empire had no choice. It had to plunge headlong to ruin. It had no “saving clause.” Not so with us to-day. The Working Class of the land, tutored in its mission, steeled with its dignity, and drilled to its emancipation, will not be a Twentieth Century tail to the comet of Capitalism run to seed, like the workers of the Roman Empire, who, as tail to the comet of theocratic-feudal Rome run to seed, went down in ruin along with the head.

History repeats itself. It is repeating itself. But the song will now be sung to the tune of Twentieth Century civilization.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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¹ [Known as the “Boy Emperor” (218-221 A.D.)]