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EDITORIAL

THE TRANSITION PERIOD PASSED.

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SIGNIFICANT was the remark, dropped by Senator Platt of Connecticut over the situation in Cuba, when the constitutional convention amended the "Platt Amendment." Said the Senator:

"The 'Platt Amendment' is law. The Cubans can neither accept, reject nor amend a law of the United States. They have no power to change it."

A law is either enacted by peers, or it is dictated by masters. Cuba was not a peer, sitting with the peers who enacted the alleged law. If the "Platt Amendment," placing Cuba under the suzerainty of the United States, was a law, binding on Cuba, it could be such only in the sense that the master's will is law. If we go no further, Senator Platt's remark would be significant enough. But its significance would lie simply in that it betrayed the secret thoughts of the Administration on its Cuban policy. Does there lie no deeper significance than that in the remark?

The Government of a nation like the United States, with the Declaration of Independence as its cradle song, and a written constitution as its guide, can not suddenly leap from constitutional to arbitrary language. The language of Senator Platt is that of arbitrary power. Between such language and that of constitutional power there must be a stepping stone; there must be a transition period. Which was the transition period with the Government of this country?

Universal, or manhood suffrage, implies the existence of a representative body, which, guided by its own rules, legislates for the combined constituency. The right of suffrage enjoyed by the constituency in the selection of its representative, justifies the conclusion that the legislation enacted is the work of the constituency itself. This theory held good at a time. It does not hold good to-day. In even step with the development of capitalism, there grows a fraction of the constituency to whom the theory applies less and less. That fraction finally reaches the magnitude of a numerical majority; with us, to-day, it is fully a two-thirds majority. The

attribute of the suffrage then ceases to be a mark of active co-operation in legislation. It becomes merely a sceptre of straw. In a thousand and one ways the capitalist minority emasculates the suffrage of the workingman's majority. How that minority looks to-day upon the attribute of the suffrage in the hands of the majority was well exemplified by the recent capitalist utterance: "The suffrage is all right, provided it keeps up Law and Order (read the capitalist power to fleece the workers); but if a majority of votes should be cast for a subversive policy (read subversive of capitalist robber class supremacy), then, of course, we shall not submit." That is the stage the country has now reached. A minority decrees laws in "de facto" arbitrary fashion; the fact, however, of the arbitrariness of the Government's conduct, is concealed by the fiction of universal suffrage, that to all intents and purposes has ceased to exist. The transition period between the constitutional regime, that once the Government lived under, and the arbitrary regime it has for some time started upon, is the period of the formation of the Working Class majority in the land.

The deep significance of the language held by Senator Platt lies in this, that it amounts to an announcement that the transition period is passed with the Capitalist Government of the United States, and that it has reached the rotten-ripe period of arbitrary power.

It is ill lancing a sore before it has come to a head.

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

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