

# The Public

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LOUIS F. POST, Editor.

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## EDITORIALS

President McKinley's Cuban message flatly repudiates an important part of the platform upon which he was nominated for the presidency; and if the republican party in congress adopt its recommendations, as a party measure, the party itself will be stultified.

Platforms, it has been said, do not make, but only accompany, politics. But the people of this country have come to recognize them as solemn pledges, which must be redeemed, if the occasion for redemption occurs, under penalties analogous to those that fall upon merchants who ignore their commercial obligations. Should the president's message, therefore, be approved by his party, the good faith of republican platforms will hereafter be seriously questioned.

This is not to say that every petty paragraph of a platform—thrown in

perhaps to gratify some faddist who happens to have influence for the moment with party leaders, but in which the general public has no interest—binds a party if the question afterwards becomes important. Political parties, no more than judges, should be bound by mere obiter dicta. Any man, or body of men, is apt to make casual declarations which are repudiated or explained as soon as attention is centered upon their significance. But the Cuban declarations of the republican platform of 1896 were not obiter dicta. They were not uttered casually, nor incidentally, nor carelessly, nor in reference to a subject which did not interest the American people. On the contrary, they were uttered deliberately, with a full understanding of their significance, both on the part of the platform makers and of the public, and with reference to a subject in which the American people were already profoundly interested. If ever a political party can be in honor bound by its platform declarations, the republican party is bound by the Cuban plank of its platform of 1896; and if ever a party can repudiate a sacred pledge, the republican party will have done so if it marks time, as a party, to the music of the president's Cuban message.

To meet in advance any charge of injustice in the foregoing comment, compare the Cuban plank of the republican platform of 1896, on which Mr. McKinley appealed to the people for election, with his message of 1898, in which he appeals to a republican congress for permission to cast that plank adrift. Here is the plank in full:

From the hour of achieving their own independence, the people of the United States have regarded with sympathy the struggles of other American people to free themselves from European domination. We watch with deep and abiding interest the heroic battle of the Cuban patriots against cruelty and oppression, and our best hopes go out for the full success of their determined contest for liberty. The government of Spain having lost control of Cuba, and being unable to protect the property or lives of resident American citizens, or to comply with its treaty obligations, we believe the govern-

ment of the United States should actively use its influences and good offices to restore peace and give independence to the island.

To what "heroic battle" did those words allude, if not to the insurrection then and still in progress in Cuba? Who were the Cuban patriots referred to, if not the men who were fighting under Gomez? To whom did the best hopes of the republican party thus go out "for the full success of their determined contest for liberty," if not to the civil government from which he and his men derived their authority, and which, in better condition than ever, now asks our recognition? In whose behalf, if not of that government, was it intended by this plank of the republican platform that the United States should actively endeavor to "restore peace and give independence"? Surely the republican party did not then allude to the make-believe provincial government which Spain is now setting up, and which in state papers her officials call the "insular" government. That make-shift had no existence when the republican platform was adopted—not even the paper existence which it enjoys now. The Cuban struggle with which the republican platform expressed sympathy, and the government whose independence it demanded, could have been no other struggle than that of Gomez and his compatriots, nor any other government than the insurgent government under which and for which they were and still are fighting. Not only was that government the only one which was battling for liberty on the island, but it was the only one in the triumph of which the American people were interested.

This is so commonly understood that no proof of it should be necessary, but proof is at hand. So strong had public feeling grown in behalf of the insurgents as far back as the winter of 1896 that the senate, on the 28th of February, of that year, by the overwhelming vote of 64 to 6, adopted a concurrent resolution recognizing a condition of public war between Spain and what the resolution called "the government proclaimed and for some time maintained by force of arms by

the people of Cuba." A resolution substantially identical was adopted about the same time in the lower house by the still more extraordinary vote of 213 to 17. These resolutions were a demand for the independence of what for brevity we may call the Gomez government. To that, and to that alone, would the descriptive words of the resolution apply: "the government proclaimed and for some time maintained, by force of arms, by the people of Cuba." And if there were no other reason, these resolutions would prove that when, four months later, the republican delegates to St. Louis inserted the Cuban plank in their platform, they meant, as had their copartisans who in senate and house voted for the resolutions, to demand the independence of the republic set up by the Cuban insurgents.

The plank quoted above from the republican platform was clearly an expression of sympathy with and a demand for the independence of the insurgents. It had no reference to any government—existing, prospective, or possible—except the government of the insurgents, the Gomez government, the government of Cuba libre.

But President McKinley's message advises point blank against recognizing even the belligerency, much less the independence, of that government. It extends no sympathy to the "Cuban patriots" who have battled for three years "against cruelty and oppression." No hope does it hold out for "the full success of their determined contest for liberty." It makes no recommendation for the restoration of peace with insurgent independence. On the contrary, it asks authority from congress for the president to turn the guns of the United States against the insurgents—against the very Cuban patriots with whom his party platform sympathized. If that is not the meaning of the kind of intervention he proposes, an intervention which involves, in the language of his message, "hostile constraint upon both the parties to the contest"—the Cuban insurgents as well as the Spaniards—we should be glad to be set right. It is impossible to compare the republican platform on the Cuban question with the president's message on the same subject, without concluding that one is irreconcilably opposed to the other. President McKinley has taken upon himself the responsibility of officially scorning the Cuban

pledge of his party. It remains to be seen whether other leaders will finally commit the organization to this palpable breach of good faith.

There is, however, something in the president's message of more vital import to the American people than his infidelity to the solemn pledge upon which he was elected. It is his request of congress for the delegation to him of its exclusive constitutional power of declaring war. For be it observed that what he requests is not authority to determine the time, or to take advantage of an auspicious occasion, for beginning hostilities. Such power might wisely be granted to a commander in chief after war had been determined upon by the representatives of the people. But he asks for plenary power to determine whether there shall be war or not, and what shall be the cause of the war. This is a power which it was never intended to lodge anywhere but with congress, and one which no congress should grant nor any president solicit.

Turn to the message, in the concluding part, and see that this is indeed the power—in controvention of our supreme law as well as dangerous to our liberties—which the president seeks. Here is the language in full:

In view of these facts and these considerations, I ask the congress to authorize and empower the president to take measures to secure a full and speedy termination of hostilities between the government of Spain and the people of Cuba, and to secure in the island the establishment of a stable government capable of maintaining order and observing its international obligations, insuring peace and tranquillity and the security of its citizens, as well as our own, and to use the military and naval forces of the United States as may be necessary for these purposes.

The power here requested is power to begin war, but against whom and for what? In one part of the message congress is given to understand that it is to be made against both the Spanish and the Cuban insurgents, if they don't stop shedding one another's blood; for he explains, as already quoted, that the intervention which he advocates involves "hostile constraint upon both the parties to the contest." But nowhere is there any indication of what act shall constitute the cause of war. If congress were to give a president power like that, it would virtually abrogate its own exclusive authority to declare

war. The delegation of constitutional functions should have a limit somewhere; and right here, at least, a limit should be placed.

Why does the president solicit this unconstitutionally autocratic authority? The question raises another important consideration. He does not intend to use it to secure the independence of the insurgents. That is made very plain by the message. He distinctly says that the insurrection lacks the attributes of statehood. For the same reason he does not intend to use it in support of a recognition of belligerency. Nothing remains, then, for him to do, but, as he says, intervene to end the war. This intervention, he adds, may take either of two forms: Intervention as an impartial neutral, imposing restraint to compel a compromise, or as an active ally of one of the parties. The first form he quite distinctly disclaims any intention of adopting. He would not put this country at enmity with Spain by becoming the ally of the insurgents; and, although he does not say so, it is to be inferred from all he does say, that he would not unite with Spain to enforce a continuance of absolute Spanish dominion over Cuba. But he could do what he intimates that he would do, namely, order both Spain and the insurgents to compromise their differences, and fight them both if necessary to enforce his order. But that is not all. After bringing both Spain and her rebellious colony to an agreement, by force of American arms, after thus executing the mandate of his message—"the war in Cuba must stop!"—he would still use the army and navy, making further war upon Cuba if necessary, to "secure in the island the establishment of a stable government." In other words, President McKinley solicits investiture with the war-making power, in order to put an end to the Spanish war in Cuba, not through the recognition and firm establishment by us of the existing Cuban republican government, but by dispersing that government, and with the consent of Spain, voluntary or enforced, setting up an entirely new government upon the island. Are the American people hot for war of that kind?

This message of the president is nominally a plea for peace. But peace upon what terms? Peace with liberty? Not at all. To the question of liberty Mr. McKinley seems to have given no consideration. His ultima-

tum is peace with stability! Such is the peace they have in Russia—peace with stability! Such, too, is the peace of partitioned Poland—peace with stability! Was it not peace with stability that reigned in Warsaw?

And though the message is nominally a plea for peace, it is very far from being a peaceful manifesto. If its recommendations be carried out, it will lead straight to war. The United States cannot undertake to impose "hostile restraint" upon any party to a contest without fighting, nor upon both parties to the contest, without fighting both parties. Recognition of Cuban independence need not involve us in war. The burden of beginning or provoking war would at any rate, in that event, be upon Spain. And such recognition, even without intervention on our part, might insure Cuba's freedom. Our playing the part of a Spanish policeman is the principal obstacle with which Cuba has to contend. But the moment that the president should undertake to use the power which he asks from congress, and begin his work of "pacifying" Cuba, war would break upon us. The message is essentially a war message. Worse than that, it is a message which leads on to a war, not for liberty, but against liberty—against the only thing for which this country ought ever to go to war at all.

The attempt of Congressman Grosvenor, the president's spokesman in the lower house, to make it appear that the message contemplates liberty as well as stability, was extremely weak. It would be better for Mr. McKinley to stand by his message as transmitted, than to try to explain into it sentiments which it does not express. He would then have the credit at least of possessing the courage of his opinions. Grosvenor's explanation was based upon a single expression in the message, that in which the president speaks of his purpose to establish in Cuba a stable government capable of "observing its international obligations." No government can have international obligations, argues Mr. Grosvenor, unless it is independent, and therefore the president meant independence. The argument is thin. A government with international obligations in respect of Cuba might be imposed upon Cuba, and though that would be an independent government, it would not be independence for Cuba. Canada has a government capable of observing in-

ternational obligations. It is the English government. And satisfied though the Canadians be with that government, Canada is not independent. Cuba, also, once had a government capable of observing its international obligations. It was the government of Spain. But Cuba was not independent. Moreover, a local government might be thrust upon Cuba by American power, by "hostile constraint upon both parties to the contest," as the president puts it in his message, which would be capable of observing its international obligations, and yet not be independent. But waiving these obvious considerations, which show that the president's language, which Grosvenor quotes, is inadequate to express what Grosvenor says it means, the message, as a whole, and the whole conduct of the president previous to his transmittal of the message, negative the good faith of Grosvenor's explanation. In the preliminary negotiations with Spain no step was taken by the president looking to independence. So the message itself shows. According to his own report the president asked nothing of Spain but the abrogation of the reconcentrado order, permission to relieve the suffering, and a suspension of hostilities until October—during the period, that is to say, when the Spanish troops in Cuba cannot fight to advantage and the insurgents can. The utmost that can be said in support of Grosvenor's explanation, is that the words that he quotes might, in a stress, be interpreted to America as meaning independence, and to Europe as meaning something else. But that is a diplomatic use of words which is unworthy of American candor. Mr. McKinley would fare better with his countrymen as an outspoken opponent of independence, than in the role of a sly middle-age diplomat in which his friends who read "independence" into his message are placing him.

We have no intention of reflecting upon the president's integrity. But when his susceptibility to the hypnotic influences of stronger minds is considered, in connection with the fact that Senators Elkins and Hanna—who would strangle in an atmosphere not impregnated with dollars or the possibility of dollars—and men of their own sordid species, have been his closest advisers throughout the preparation of the message, and that the document is notable for its marked indifference to all con-

siderations of human liberty, it is difficult to get rid altogether of the idea that the "stable" Cuban government for the establishment of which an irresponsible and unconstitutional authority over war and peace is solicited by the president, is not wholly disconnected from some plan for the future government of Cuba by a syndicate.

The reason for the carpenters' strike in Chicago last week is suggestive of a possible change in the character of labor conflicts. Here was no question of hours, or of wages, or of employing "scab" workmen. The strike involved nothing but a question, an entirely new question, of working for "scab" employers. While the employing carpenters were willing to concede all the demands of the men, they themselves demanded in return that the men should work for no employing carpenter who did not belong to the employers' union. To this demand the men refused to accede; and as the employers had made it an item of the agreement with their men, an agreement which they refused to sign unless this item were accepted, the men went on strike. It was a clear case of putting the foot into the other boot. In substance, this strike was by the employers against the men, because the men insisted upon their right to work for "scab" employers. It was probably the first instance of the kind; but in the regular processes of evolution from this point, a condition may yet be produced in which employers' unions and workmen's unions, in making treaties with each other, will stipulate, the one that they will not employ "scab" workmen, and the other that they will not work for "scab" bosses.

Certain private interests in the region of the great lakes never allow an opportunity to go by for promoting the possibilities of naval ship building and the maintenance of a war fleet upon those waters. Our difficulties with Spain are no exception. Already, on pretense of the necessity of building warships on the lakes, the abrogation of our treaty with Great Britain, which forbids a naval establishment by either power upon these inland seas, is being urged—nominally, upon patriotic grounds of course, but in truth from the same motives as those which have given us a medieval tariff, namely, the promotion of private interests. The treaty in question was made in 1818, and has