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EDITORIAL

AMENDMENT XVI.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE President's message, barely half a column long, to the extraordinary session, to which he has convened the 62nd Congress, deals, so far as its wording is concerned, with the reciprocity agreement which he entered into with Canada, and which the Congress which expired on March 4th refused to ratify. In point of fact the message deals with a matter wholly different. It is a manifesto; a pronunciamiento. It really is to this effect:

“Gentleman—Section 3 of Article II of the Constitution has something to the effect that the President ‘shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.’ With the first part of this passage there need be no objection—let the President give information to the Congress. The second portion of the passage, however, is decidedly objectionable. This thing of ‘recommending’ measures to the consideration of the Congress makes small potatoes of the President. The Congress may listen, will listen—and, then, do as it pleases. It may even adopt measures exactly the opposite of those ‘recommended’ by the President. May be that theory of the way the wheels should work in the machinery of government was all right at one time. It is all wrong now. It has been all wrong for some time. Fact is that for some time the practise has ignored the theory. Measures were not always ‘recommended.’ Bills, embodying the measures were drafted by the Executive, and sent to Congress for passage. The form of ‘recommending’ for ‘consideration’ was preserved. In actuality the measure was enacted by the Executive. He voted the Congressmen. He did so by means of patronage bestowed, or withheld. You see the practise had knocked quite a hole into the theory. The stiff-neckedness of the last Congress made it clear to me that the theory had to have its head caved in in full view of the Nation.

“In calling you together, the way I have done, I have performed the caving-in operation. I did not call you together because I was affected by the absurdity of a new Congress, elected one early November day, not meeting until a year and a month later. From the language of my message, and the matter that I bring before you, you will readily perceive that the reason of my convening you is not to have you ‘consider,’ but to have you ‘do.’ The previous Congress impudently refused. I order you to ‘do.’

“New occasions, gentlemen, breed new duties. Congress henceforth is not to ‘consider’; Congress henceforth is to ‘register’ the will of the President.

“Gentlemen, you are hereby notified that I have moved, seconded and triumphantly carried and enacted a new amendment to the Constitution—Amendment XVI.”

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