
Territorial Expansion (December 13, 1898)

[Ottumwa, Iowa, Dec. 13, 1898.]

First, I am opposed to territorial expansion on the lines proposed by the present administration, because it is in flagrant violation of our traditions and the fundamental principles of our government. We have declared that “government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed” and if this be true, and I believe it is, we have no right, even though we have the power, to seize Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines, and other islands that came into our custodianship as the result of the war.

Furthermore, we declared at the beginning that our war with Spain was for humanity and not for conquest, and if now we gobble up the islands and people we pretended to set free, we will stand convicted of breaking faith before the civilized world.

That the protests against expansion will go unheeded is a foregone conclusion and the reason is self-evident. Under the Republican administration Cuba and Puerto Rico will within five years be completely owned by a few plutocrats who will hold them as their private plantations and the <hapless Cubans and Puerto Ricans>¹ will realize that instead of having been liberated, they simply exchanged masters.

Second, a protectorate should be established over the Philippines and as soon as their domestic affairs are settled and they have established a government of their own they should be allowed to rule themselves and <work> out their own destiny as an independent nation.

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¹ Handwritten amendment by Debs to the published copy preserved in his scrapbook.