

The Case of John Turner

Ross Winn

1903

Uncle Sam is in a bad way. He has undertaken to do that which no despot ever quite succeeded in doing. He has assumed the task of limiting thought, of placing an embargo upon belief. He says that no one shall come to his shores who disbelieves in government. If Jefferson was alive he would no doubt be greatly astonished to learn that accident of birth alone would prevent him from being a criminal under a federal law, because Jefferson did not believe in government. He thought all government an evil, to be endured only because the people were not ready to abolish it altogether. John Turner does not differ materially from this position. He would have the people abolish government, but he does not wish to force them to do it. He is trying to educate the masses along the lines Jefferson would have approved. And John Turner is confined in a federal dungeon by the arbitrary order of a federal cabinet minister because he holds a certain belief that was held by the author of the Declaration of Independence, viz., that all government is an evil and consequently should be abolished as soon as possible.

This law was enacted by an administration that prohibited the circulation of the Declaration of Independence in the Philippine islands as a treasonable document. It is enforced by an administration that governs by military authority eight millions of people without their consent, without a constitution and without representation. This so-called Anti-Anarchist Law, under which such foreigners of world-wide fame as Leo Tolstoy, Peter Kropotkin, Elesee Reclus, Maxim Gorky, and Ibsen, the dramatist, are excluded from our shores, ought to be a stench in the nostrils of the American people.

But is it? No. The people are as supinely indifferent to their liberties as were the thoughtless populace of Rome when Marcus Antonius stole away their reason with his honeyed lying words. The people are not concerned with such insignificant matters as the overthrow of popular liberty. They are interested in sporting matters, army maneuvers and naval demonstrations.

A few gentlemen, none of them—be it noted—of the wage-working class, have associated themselves together for the purpose of carrying Turner's case to the Supreme Court, to test the constitutionality of the law under which he is held.

John Turner came to America as a representative of English trades unionism. The American Federation of Labor has held its national convention since Turner's arrest. Did that great body of organized labor take any notice of this law, of which one of its representatives is the first victim? Did it put upon record its protest against this attack upon the most cherished of American liberties? You just bet your sweet life it did—not. That is not what the plutocrats have got Sam

Gompers there for. Nay, nay, Pauline. The A. F. of L., with is Powderlyized Gompers and its Loyal Son Mitchell is the tail-end adjunct of the Anti-Socialistic Civic Federation, the greatest aggregation of humbugs on the American continent.

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