

Tampa Journal (January 26, 1887): The Ybor City Trouble

EDITION TAMPA JOURNAL:

Thinking that your readers may want to have a statement of the facts in regard to the troubles in Ybor City, and being in possession of the same, I here will place them at your disposal. As you well know the majority of the citizens of Ybor City are Cubans and Spaniards---the former being from Cuba and the latter from Spain. And as there exists belligerent feelings one towards the other in their native homes, it is to some extent natural that it shall exist when they become citizens of the United States. So when this feeling is taken in hand by designing men, and this patriotic hatred fanned by the flame, these Cubans and Spaniards become foes who will use every means to harass the opposite side.

When Ybor & Co., began operation in their cigar factory a Spaniard was made superintendent. Against this the employees protested, and in order to make their protest efficient made a strike through the Knights of Labor. Messrs. Ybor & Co., conceded to the strike and the foreman was dismissed, and in his place, upon the recommendation, of the Knights of Labor, who were both Spaniards and Cubans, one Santos Benitez, a Cuban, was appointed to the position. The position is one of influence and great honor in the factory, as the superintendent employs those who he likes and dismisses the as it suits him. When Santos Benitez came into the foreman's place Spaniards and Cubans were at work. Soon he commenced to dismiss the Spaniards until but few were left at work in the factory, and to aid him in his designs he organized, or caused to be organized, what is known as the "Cuban Confederation" at Ybor City. This is a political organization, and has for its objects, the instillation of hatred in the Cuban mind against everything Spanish. They are to do everything against a Spaniard, refuse him work, and even refuse to work in the same shop with the Spaniards. Fortified with this Cuban hatred to Spain, Santos Benitez, had declared that no Spaniard should work in the factory. A great many of the Cubans and Spaniards at this place are Knights of Labor, and as long as the Knights held together they could control. But the doctrine of the Cuban Confederation had caused a division. On one side a part of the Cubans, who were followers of Benitez, on the other many of the best Cubans and all of the Spaniards. And it is noteworthy that all the Cubans are sober, industrious men---in a word good citizens.

Some time since Mr. Ybor brought from Cuba a Spaniard, Antonio Marti, promising him work as long as the factory should continue, and to further insure

him in work, sent at their expense for Marti's family. Marti is a member of the Knights of Labor Assembly at Ybor City. Saturday evening, the 15th, instead, Mr. Benitez dismissed Marti. The next day a committee of K of L waited on Mr. Manrara, one of the men of Ybor & Co., and asked why Marti was dismissed, and if it was the wish of the firm? Mr. Manrara replied that so far as he knew Marti was dismissed without cause, and that he would prefer for Marti to remain at work. A demand was then made on Mr. Benitez to restore Marti to work. This he promptly refused. A demand was then made on Mr. Manrara in the name of the Knights of Labor, to dismiss Benitez. This he refused. A strike was then ordered.

Wednesday evening a committee from the Knights of Labor Assembly of Ybor City visited the American Assembly in Tampa, made a statement as above, and asked that the Americans give them such aid as they deemed best. A committee of five from the Tampa assembly was appointed to give such aid as they deemed necessary after investigating the cause that led to the strike. Accordingly this committee of five waited on Mr. Manrara and asked him to explain the cause of the strike. Mr. Manrara in substance as above, and further, that the firm would be the losers by the dismissal of Marti as they would have to indemnify him for all loss he might sustain. That the employees of the factory made Mr. Benitez superintendent, and while he would not accede to the demand of the committee that had waited on him, if it was manifested on him that a majority of the employees did not wish Mr. Benitez superintendent that he would then act by dismissing Benitez. A meeting of all of the Knights of Labor was then called, and from the meeting a committee of fifteen, consisting of five that were opposed to Benitez, five that were in his favor, and the five Americans with power to adjust all troubles. At the session of this committee of fifteen, charges were preferred against Benitez that he would not give work to the Knights of Labor because they were Spaniards, and that he had said that no Spaniards should work in the factory of Messrs. Ybor & Co. This his friends admitted was true. A resolution was then adopted. That if Benitez would restore Marti to his work and in the future give work to all Knights of Labor on their merit, and not on the grounds of nationality, and if he should dismiss a Knight on the grounds that his work was not good, the party dismissed might appeal to a committee of cigar makers, and sign a contract to this effect, the strike would be declared off, otherwise the strike would be carried on. This was adopted by a vote of thirteen (13) to two (2), and these two said their reason for voting against it was because they did not think Benitez would agree to it. A committee was appointed to wait on Mr. Benitez, and he came before it, at once stated he would cut his right

hand off before he would sign that or any other paper of the kind. But asked for time to further consider the matter. The work of the committee was then interrupted by the volleys of the assassins that laid low Manuel Martinez, a Knight in high standing, a good, quiet law-abiding citizen, a Cuban by birth, who was opposing Benitez, and the wounding of three other Knights. Of the assassins we say nothing. That is for the courts of the country. And may God judge these officers as they are faithful or unfaithful in their trust. The committee of fifteen met again Saturday the 22nd, and offered to arbitrate with Benitez, without success.

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