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EDITORIAL

BERGER'S MISS NO. 13.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ALTHOUGH he introduced his remarks, in the speech that he delivered on April 28 in favor of free trade, with the words that he spoke “as a farmer, one among the few farmers” in the House, Representative James C. Cantrill of Kentucky struck the attitude of a special guardian of the workingman.

It was in the interest not of the farmer only, that Cantrill demanded the abolition of the tariff, so that “with free sewing machines the farmers’ wives can sew up our protection friends, the standpatters, in free burlap and salt them away with free salt to keep until the final day of judgment.”

It was in the interest, not of the farmer only that, with wit unexcelled even by the French free trade wit Bastiat, Cantrill demolished the radically false economic theory of protectionists known as the “balance of trade,” according to which the larger the volume of goods exported by a country in comparison with its imports, all the wealthier that country is—’twas in the interest not of the farmer only that Cantrill exposed to ridicule that ridiculous theory with the observation that “if a freezing tramp should sell his clothes, he certainly would improve his balance of trade, although not his condition”

No, the Kentucky Representative used his keen dialectics, and exhausted his oratorical powers in the interest of the workingman as well, whose burdens free trade was to lighten, whose wages free trade was to raise, whose right to organize free trade was to promote and insure.

Nor did the free trade Kentuckian indulge in such generalities only. His solicitude for the laboring man led him to observations that blasted many a false reasoning of the industrial capitalist who systematically seeks to identify the condition of his employes with his own—as, for instance, when our Kentucky farmer free trader remarked that “it would not interest the men described in the *Pittsburg Survey*, who

are worked to death and thrown on the junk pile, to figure out and to ascertain how many wives per annum a Pittsburg millionaire could afford out of the dividends of the Steel Trust"; or when he let drop the weighty statistical observation that "there would be little satisfaction to a cash girl working for the Marshall Field Co. at a weekly wage of \$3 to know that she and that corporation were jointly worth over \$50,000,000."

Obviously the free trader Cantrill was a consummate hypocrite of the regulation property-holding stamp, or an egregious ignoramus on the economics that concern his dearly beloved "laboring men."

For what reason did not Victor L. Berger, "the first and only Socialist Congressman," turn to account, in the interest of the Working Class, at least one of the numerous blanks offered in this speech by asking "the gentleman from Kentucky" in what way free trade could benefit the laboring man? in other words, in what way would, or could, free trade affect beneficially the status that both free trade and protection capitalism condemn the workingman to—the status of merchandise, bought and sold in the labor-market? again, in other words, in what way would or could free trade overthrow, or at least counteract the market law, the law which "the gentleman of Kentucky" himself reverently bowed to as "the natural law of supply and demand," according to which the price (wages) paid for labor-power is bound to tend downward? In short, in what way does free trade differ from protection, in so far as the workingman's wages are concerned, seeing that free trade, identically with protection, allows the workingman 'to preserve only so much of the fruits of his labor as the supply and demand for his hide will fetch in the market?

For what reason did not "the first and only Socialist Congressman" avail himself of the usages of the House to put any of these clarifying questions, and thereby voice the class interests of the class whose class interests Socialism voices? Why did Berger miss this choice opportunity also? Why?—Why, he was absent "on important business," the business of self-exhibition.

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