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EDITORIAL

LUXURIES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

CHAMP Clark, the minority leader in the House of Representatives, is engaged in the bootless task of bringing home to the majority leader, Sereno E. Payne, that the proposed tariff bill cuts into the necessities of the people. Payne introduced his bill with words to the effect that the rates were raised only on luxuries. Clarke asks, Is hosiery, the cost of which is to be increased 30 per centum, a “luxury”? Clark might have added, Are peas and split peas, the rates of which are to be raised from 40 cents to 45 cents per bushel—are peas a “luxury”? And spices, which were largely on the free list and contribute to render toothsome the otherwise frequently tasteless food of the workers, and which are to be assessed an average duty of 30 per centum ad valorem, are they luxury? And he might have gone on at this rate until interrupted by Payne, frequently a blunt-plain man, with this blunt-plain answer:

“Have done with our sentimental twaddle. Yourself you place no value upon the principle that your objections imply. According to you, whatever the working class has become accustomed to use is thereby taken from the category of ‘luxury’ and becomes a ‘necessary.’ Stuff and nonsense! Political economy, as understood by us and practised by both the majority and the minority element in Congress, maintains the opposite principle—‘Whatever our profits require that the working class be stripped of thereby forthwith ceases to belong to the category of “necessaries” and is raised to the category of luxuries.’” A highly scientific principle this is. It is grounded on biology and on evolution. Do we capitalists need a portion of the steaks the worker was accustomed to? Our need forthwith places the value of that portion among ‘luxuries,’ and we take it. Do we capitalists need a portion by of the bread, the salt, the peas (split and otherwise) and the spices consumed by the workers? Our need is conclusive proof that these things have become ‘luxuries,’—nay, are

really 'luxuries'—and we absorb them. It is a theory of many-sided beauty. Upon it is planted our oft-repeated claim that Labor really lives luxuriously and on luxuries only. How else could Labor shed off, as it were, so constantly, so unremittingly such a vast amount of luxury?"

And Champ will wink at Sereno, and Sereno back at Champ—and the mock battle in favor of Labor's "necessaries" will subside to the tune of "luxuries."

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

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slpns@slp.org