

EDITORIAL

THE CONSUMER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

BY the time the debate on the Tariff is ended there will be one English word left so mauled and maimed that it will be hard to tell what it stands for—the “Consumer.”

It was Senator Bailey—the eloquent, the erudite, the keen Senator Bailey of Texas—who took the latest whack at the fated word. The Senator’s policy, so he announced, was “to lift the burden from the consumer and lay it upon those who do not need to work.” By all systems of reasoning, in a sentence so constructed the words “consumer” and “those who do not need to work” must stand for opposites. If “those who do not need to work” are the opposite of the “consumer” it would follow that “those who do not need to work” do not “consume.” The ultimate conclusion from Senator Bailey’s sentence is that there exists a set of people, a class, an order of beings, a genus, or whatever you may call it, that can live without consuming—an arrant piece of nonsense.

How comes it that one illustrious Senator after another perpetrates the same offence? How comes it that, one after another, they tug at the word “consumer” in such utterly idiotic fashion? The answer is obvious.

Society is not divided between “consumers” and “non-consumers”; everybody consumes. Society is divided between “producers” and “non-producers,” “workers” and “non-workers.” A serious consequence flows from this division. The workers consume least, the non-workers consume most. If the quantity of consumption were taken as the determining factor, and a division were to be made along the line of “consumption,” then the pre-eminent “consumer” and “those who do not need to work” would coincide.

It is this fact that accounts for the Senatorial tangle on the “Consumer.” One and all, the Senators seek to escape the ugly fact that the non-workers are

consumers as well as the workers, in fact, more so. One and all the Senators, being the political agents of the non-workers, seek to protect these; and, realizing that it would be self-incriminating to demand protection from burdens for non-workers, are driven to the manoeuvre of making it appear as if their thoughts were bent exclusively in the interest of the workers. The calling of these consumers seems to offer a ready way out of the trouble. But it happens in this as in all such instances. A trouble that can not be escaped only tangles hopelessly those who attempt the impossible feat.

He who unravels the Senatorial tangle on the “consumer” sees clearly that the consumer whom the Senators wish to unburden is he who consumes without working.

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