

EDITORIAL

THE CALIFORNIA ALIEN LAND BILL. {1}

By DANIEL DE LEON

HYSTERICS ever are a feature of unstrung nerves; and unstrung nerves usually are a feature of petty bourgeois conflicting interests, fencing with each other behind the parapet of the Law.

The breed is now being self-exhibited in the matter of the Bradford alien land bill in California.

That the land of a Nation should not be owned by aliens is a principle fundamental. Based upon the principle, the Legislature of California is considering the Bradford bill, which provides that non-naturalizable aliens should acquire land for a period no longer than one year, unless the alien declares his intention to become a citizen; and that land shall not be held under a lease by such an alien tenant for a period exceeding five years. Tested by principles universally accepted in international law, the Bradford bill—in so far as it concerns aliens—is unimpeachable.

It happens, however, that the Bradford bill has for its object everything but the re-enunciation of an international principle. It happens that the bill has for its purpose to lay the foundation for measures which shall aid one set of fruit growers in their competition with others, these others being the Chinese, the Japanese in particular.

The interests which the Bradford bill would “take under the arms” are, however, at war with others, to wit, the landed interests, who desire an open market, and whose price would be lowered if the market of purchasers and lessees were narrowed by the exclusion of the Japanese and Chinese.

If “patriotism” and “respect for the law” were an actual and not a pretended feeling with these warring California interests, then the supporters of the Bradford bill should have easy sailing, and its opponents find themselves on the breakers.

But such is the effect of false pretence upon those who use the law merely as a parapet from behind which to do their fighting while concealing their actual purpose, that the Bradforders are throwing fits, and the anti-Bradforders are themselves in such hysterical frame of mind that they can not utilize the blanks which their adversaries give them.

When it comes down to the hard pan of the subject, alienism does not end with citizenship. The well known term “alien landlordism” illustrates the point. The term was not born of the fact of aliens naturalizable, or not, owning land; it was born of the fact of land being owned by men (or women) who were aliens to all intent and purposes—aliens in the country where their land lay, and for which they cared no more than as a source of revenue, even to the country’s undoing,—a revenue to be squandered in other countries—squandered in riotous, often bestial living.

If the anti-Bradforders of California were not too hysterical to think, they would applaud the Bradforders as “sublimely patriotic” and demand of them that, as such, they enlarge the scope of their bill so as condignly to castigate “alien landlordism.” If the Bradforders were not victims of the nervousness that comes from false pretence they never would have framed the Bradford bill at all.

As it is, the hysterics of both Bradforders and anti-Bradforders have reached Washington, and are drawing into their vortex the featherweights of the land on the subject of “Oriental Immigration.”

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded March 2015

slpns@slp.org