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EDITORIAL

BERGER'S MISS NO. 4.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE House of Representatives being in Committee of the Whole on the Farmers' Free List bill, Representative James M. Graham of Illinois delivered on May 3rd a lengthy speech that one should think was expressly intended to set up a series of clean targets, challenging Socialist bolts—so many were the opportunities which the speech held out to Victor L. Berger to “interpolate,” in strict parliamentary form and conformity with the usages of the House. Berger missed them all. In successive articles we shall treat the leading “misses” on that occasion.

For instance—

Tackling the false reasoning that Protectionists delight to indulge in of comparing the higher (money) wages paid in America with the lower ones paid in European countries, and imputing the more favorable American (money) wages to Protection, Mr. Graham said: “How ridiculously absurd, to compare wages and conditions in two countries when the population is twenty times as dense in one as in the other **and competition proportionally keen.**”

This statement, made by a Free Trade, or Low Tariff man, who was all along claiming a lower tariff was in the interest of the workingman, was a bugle call to bring the Socialist to his feet with the request—“Will the gentleman yield?” Representative Sims of Tennessee, who was at the time officiating as chairman, would have asked: “Does the gentleman from Illinois yield to the gentleman from Wisconsin?” The gentleman from Illinois would certainly have yielded; he yielded repeatedly to others; it is the “courtesy of the House.” Whereupon Berger could have scored the following inning for sound, for Socialist, for Labor political economy:

“The gentleman’s reasoning to the effect that a bare comparison of American wages with wages in other countries is an absurdity, in so far as the comparison

intended to argue in favor of Protection, is cogent. As the gentleman correctly stated, other factors have to be considered. Among the determining factors cited by the gentleman was the factor of 'competition' among the workers for jobs. In other words, the condition of the Labor-Market. This, of course, means that, where and when the supply in the market is in excess of the demand, Labor will fetch a proportionally lower price, that is, wage. This is a recognition of sociologic fact that, within the frame work of the present, or capitalist system of production, the price of Labor is determined—like the price of cattle, of bales of hay, of hairpins, in short, of all other merchandise,—by the supply of and the demand for the same in the market. And, finally, this is the consequent admission of the further sociologic fact that, within the capitalist system, the status of the workingman is, economically, neither better nor worse than that of an article of merchandise. Now, then, keeping in mind this pregnant social and economic fact, pointedly indicated by the gentleman of Illinois himself, I would request him to explain to me, to this House, and, through this House, to the wage earners of the land—for whom he expresses such admirable solicitude, and for the benefit of whose wages he so fervently advocates a lower tariff—I would request him to explain by what process of economic, or any other, reasoning the low tariff or free trade man can make out that a lower tariff can redound to the benefit of the wage earner, of the wage slaves, to put it plainly. Seeing, as the gentleman correctly indicated, that wages, the price of Labor, depend upon the supply in the Labor Market, hence, that where the supply is high wages will be low—seeing that, by what process of reasoning does the law of supply and demand in the Labor Market cease to be operative under Free Trade, or a lower tariff? Does it not rather follow that, high tariff, or low tariff, or no tariff, wages depend upon the supply of and the demand for the merchandise workingman—hence, that the tariff issue is of no economic interest whatever to the working class?"

While other Congressmen freely availed themselves of the usages of the House and interrupted Representative Graham with questions in the interest of the specific capitalist interests that they are the watchdogs of in Congress, the "first Socialist Congressman," supposedly the representative of the Working Class, to the tune of \$7,500 a year for two years, was away from his post, making grandstand

speeches outside, to justify his impotence inside of Congress—and missed the opportunity.

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