

EDITORIAL

A BOOMERANG WITTICISM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**A**T the rate they are going now,” said Claus A. Spreckles, President of the Federal Sugar Refining Company, in the course of his argument before the House Ways and Means Committee favoring a reduction of the duties on raw sugar—“at the rate they are going now, they will be having sugar plantations in Maine, and meat packeries in Alaska.”

The statement is witty. It embodies one of the many satirical arguments that Free Trade makes against protection.

The Protection idea is that the Government must raise the duty upon any article, produced in the country, high enough to compensate the domestic producer for the higher expense he is put to, compared with the foreign producer. Raisers of the sugar beet have availed themselves of this principle. It costs so much more to raise the sugar beet than to raise the sugar cane in Cuba, that the sugar beet industry managed to clap high duties on the imported article. The first step being taken in that direction, the next steps were obvious. Sugar beets can be raised with comparative ease in California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Oregon. The sugar beeters extended their industry into territories that are less favorable, Michigan among others. With the increased unproductiveness of the soil, brought with the sugar beet culture, the sugar beet men demand higher protection. Wittily, at this stage, Mr. Spreckles objects that sugar plantations may be expected to go up in frozen Maine, where, of course, the cost of production will be immensely higher, demanding a proportionately higher tariff.

The absurdity of the Protection “idea” is well exposed, but does it purge capitalist Free Trade of its share of fraud? The very personality of Mr. Spreckles proves the contrary. What Free Trade will accomplish under capitalism, is, not to lower the cost of living so that the working class shall keep the difference, but to

lower the output of capital that the capitalist will need in order to start his business.

High tariff or low tariff, wages, that is, the share of Labor in its product, depend upon the labor supply in the labor market. The supply being greatly above the demand, Free Trade translates itself into continued wage slavery for the workers with increased profits for the capitalist.

During the debates in Congress on slavery in the fifties a similar discussion went on between the Northern employers and the Southern slaveholders. The former disanted upon the iniquities of slavery and demanded “free” labor; the Southern slaveholders argued, and time has proved them correct, that Northern “free labor” left the worker no better off than the slave in the South.

Such is the inherent falsity of capitalism that no progress accrues to the benefit of the workers, it is all absorbed by the capitalist—as “free labor,” certainly a theoretic progress, only enriched the capitalist and left labor with its nose to the grindstone; so with Free Trade. Surely a saner proposition than one that would promote sugar plantations in Maine, Free Trade is a Claus-A.-Spreckles promoting proposition, with labor out in the cold.

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

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