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EDITORIAL

## BERGER'S MISS NO. 19.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**O the unsophisticated, there was something mysteriously uncanny in a certain performance that took place on {the} floor of the House of Representatives in the course of the session of the 12th day of July.

On that day a tariff bill was reported unanimously—aye, unanimously—by the Committee on Ways and Means;—a bill to amend paragraph 500 of the Republican act of August 5, 1909, by allowing the free importation of certain articles not thought of in the said act.

A bill removing the duty collected under a Republican act—such a bill agreed upon, not merely by the Democratic, but also by all the Republican members of the Committee—that, assuredly, was something mysterious, if not uncanny.

The debate that ensued was short, yet was it long enough to clear up the mystery, and turn the uncanniness to drollery.

It developed that a lady, owning a Pomeranian pup, who went to Europe with her pet, and returned with the same, was, upon her arrival here, submitted to the horror of seeing the pup seized for duties. The customs inspector would listen to neither sense nor pleadings. Appealed to by the lady on the score of heart and sentiment, he remained obdurate. Argued with by the fair pup owner that her pet was no merchandise, and had not even been bought abroad, but was born and bought in America, and was taken abroad, and now returned to its own home—the customs officer coldly pointed to paragraph 500 of the act of 1909 which provided no loophole for the pup to slip through. The lady, possessed, evidently, of political pull, set her wires agoing. The result was magical. The whole machinery of the government was set in motion. The House Committee on Ways and Means was hurriedly convened. The upshot was an amendment to paragraph 500 covering the Pomeranian pup under an all embracing clause for such cases.

The bill became known as the "lapdog bill." While no Member of the House spoke against it, and the fact was obvious that Republicans and Democrats alike were to concur, the one and the other took occasion to indulge in considerable banter at each other.

On the Democratic side, Representative John J. Fitzgerald of New York led. On the Republican side, strange to say, the sedate old ex-Speaker and Sereno E. Payne, were the fuglemen. The former pooh-poohed at the Republicans for being so ready, they who had been objecting at every step to any amendments of the tariff before the Tariff Board had reported, to vote for this free pup importation. The latter returned the compliment with many satirical shots at the Democratic majority's affection for Pomeranian pups, mongrel and yellow dogs. The insurgent Norris went further. Amid jokes cracked over the back of the Society for the Protection of Poodle Dogs in the District of Columbia, he aired his democratic, "common people" sentiments by telling the story of how one day, walking down Connecticut avenue he "saw the door of a residence open—a residence that had cost perhaps a couple of million dollars—and a well-dressed woman came out and there drove up in front of it a carriage with two men in uniform sitting up in front and one man in uniform sitting on the seat in the rear, and as the woman came down the walk those men got down and took off their silk hats and bowed almost to the sidewalk as they opened the carriage door and put her in the carriage. She carried in her arms a beautiful poodle dog, all decked out in ribbons, trinkets and flowers." And he proceeded to say that he watched her as they drove down the avenue, and how his heart bled in pity for this woman's wealth who, he supposed was childless, but that presently the door of that mansion opened again, and a colored woman came out wheeling a baby carriage, and that when he noticed the expensive trinkets and playthings about that baby, he felt sorry for the little baby. And more of this sort of thing.

Finally Representative William Hughes of New Jersey lost all patience. He did not stand upon the formality of time being granted to him. He broke in directly with: "Mr. Speaker, I ask to be recognized for five minutes"; and he was; and brushing aside the banter of the debate as a manifestation of the "silly season" when "the dog days are upon us," he presented the serious aspect of the bill.

Did the "first and only Socialist in Congress" do likewise? If Victor L. Berger is

too spineless to demand recognition for five minutes when the subject on the tapis is of a nature to cause the Members' jaws to be set, could he not have mustered up spine enough to demand recognition for two minutes at a time when the nerves of the Republican and Democratic Members were relaxed in mirth? Were the kennel-like accommodations, vouchsafed by the steamers to proletarians coming or returning to America and the treatment they receive on landing, in contrast with the Asiatic splendor that homing lap-dogs enjoy on the same steamers, and the consideration that this particular Pomeranian pup received from Congress,—were not thoughts thereof prods enough to cause the “only Socialist Congressman” to rise to his feet, demand recognition, and hold the mirror up to the otherwise mutually snarling but now unanimously hilarious bunch of bourgeois politicians? Evidently not. Conspicuous by its absence in the *Congressional Record* is any entry credited on the occasion to “Mr. Berger.”

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