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EDITORIAL

## BERGER'S MISS NO. 15.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**“W**E care nothing for the freedom of the foreign manufacturer that the present law interferes with or restrains, but we do care for the restraint that the present law imposes against the exercise of the inherent and what ought to be inalienable right of every American citizen to trade where, and when, and how he pleases”—such was the key-note sentence in the long speech delivered on June 8 against the wool schedule, Schedule K, by Representative William G. Brantley from Georgia, who throughout the speech posed as the paladin of Freedom, Labor’s Freedom specifically.

The key-note passage occurred during the first hour of Mr. Brantley’s speech, before his time was extended indefinitely. During that first hour the Republican Representatives must have sat like “baked owls,” speechless at the onslaught upon them. Not one dared interject a question, or ask the gentleman from Georgia to “yield.” The speech was throughout accentuated by “Applause from the Democratic side,” and by “Loud applause.”

Surely Victor L. Berger, “the first Socialist, in Congress” did not figure among the galaxy of “baked owls”? Surely he, being the “lone,” the only Socialist in Congress, felt the full responsibility that rested on his shoulders when that brazenly untrue key-note—brazenly untrue with regard to the Working Class—was sounded? Surely he promptly rose and, requesting the gentleman from Georgia to yield, asked:

“If it is the inherent right of every American citizen to trade ‘where, and when, and how he pleases,’ then there must be some statutory enactment that suspends the exercise of this right by the Working Class. The gentleman from Georgia declares that the exercise of this right is interfered with by the high tariff of Schedule K in certain quarters. Seeing that ‘trade’ does not mean to ‘buy’ only but to ‘sell’

also; seeing that the workingman can not sell his merchandise, labor-power, 'where, and when and how he pleases'; and seeing that Schedule K can, obviously, not be held responsible for the infringement, with regard to the workingman, of that important factor in trade, to wit, to sell;—seeing all this, I would request the gentleman from Georgia to inform us by what process of reasoning the clipping of Schedule K will restore to the wage earners of the land that right, which, though called by him 'inherent' the worker is deprived of—the right to sell 'where, and when, and how HE PLEASES.'

"I lay emphasis upon the 'pleases.' The gentleman from Georgia is too much of a scholar to fail to realize that, tho' the workingman may withdraw from one employer, and carry his merchandise, labor-power, to another, he does not therefore sell 'where, and when, and how he pleases'—

"The wage earner has no choice as to 'where'—he has nothing to say about that—he is compelled to go wherever it may please the employer to set up his plant—if it pleases the employer to remove his factory to another city or State, the wage earner's home is broken up and he must expatriate himself whither the employer may please, with the alternative to starve.—There is no 'pleases' as to the 'where.'

"The wage earner has nothing to say as to 'when.' Whenever the employer, in his private judgment, thinks it is well to shut down his plant, the wage earner has to try to sell anew. Whenever the employer chooses to reopen, the wage earner has a market.—There is no 'pleases' as to the 'when.'

"Least of all has the wage earner to say 'how' he will sell. The price of his merchandise depends upon supply and demand in the labor market. Differently from all other sellers he can not curb the supply; differently from all other commodities, the supply of or demand for the merchandise labor power lies wholly in the hands of the buyer. It is the capitalist class that alone can and does control the supply and demand of labor power. The wage earner must, in the long run, sell how the capitalist class wishes, and that is the same as to say that a change of master, or buyer, is no change to the workingman.

"Accordingly, in capitalist society the workingman can not sell 'where he pleases,' he can not sell 'when he pleases,' he can not sell 'how he pleases.'

“This being thus, in what manner would the clipping, or even the killing of Schedule K, restore to Labor its ‘inherent right’ to sell ‘where, and when, and how it pleases’ so long as capitalism abides?

“Will the gentleman from Georgia make that clear?”

Did, we asked above, Mr. Berger figure on the occasion among the galaxy of baked owls in the House? Of course he did—unless he was still more derelict to duty by being wholly absent from his post.

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