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EDITORIAL

THE ENFANT TERRIBLE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IF there were any visitors on hand, the Congressional Ways and Means Committee must have felt, at its session of the 21st inst., like a doting mamma whose enfant terrible lets out before company a painful family secret.

As dominant capitalists, and Republicans, the Ways and Means Committee are Protectionists. Before election, their cry to the workingman was: "You must have Protection. Without it, your employer, unable to compete with the 'hordes of Europe,' won't be able to sell his goods at as high a price, and your wages will go 'way, 'way down."

Into this circle of expert fleecers and prevaricators, came enfant terrible John Norris, Secretary of the American Newspaper Publishers' Association; who, being consumers of paper, and unable by the peculiar nature of their business to raise prices to their patrons, naturally seek for lower prices for paper. They are Free Tradists.

Amid that circle of fond capitalist mammas, enfant terrible Norris let out a string of awful confessions; showing that American labor was cheaper than Canadian, so the fear of competition was all moonshine; showing that the paper workers were about worst paid trade among American workingmen; and finally showing that, consequently, the Protection already enjoyed by the paper bosses was simply pouring a surplus profit into their own pockets, and not benefiting their workmen in the slightest.

Well might the Republican Ways and Means Committee turn red, and stick their fingers in their ears, and bury their faces in their handkerchiefs at the disclosures of Norris! Not only did he completely unmask the dominant capitalist cry that "Protection benefits the workers," but he also tore the veil from two other truths, long kept hidden from view by all capitalists, the "unders" as well as the

“dominants.” These truths were:

First—Wages do not depend on the prosperity of your employer. He may be rolling in wealth, you will be no better off. He may be rolling in fat, you will remain as lean as you are to-day. These paper manufacturers described by Norris are getting gorged daily with the golden stream of “surplus profit” afforded them by Protection; yet their workmen are “the worst paid of all the manufacturing industries of the country.” Consequently your wages depend not upon the size of the employer’s purse, but upon something else, upon the number of workmen outside ready to take your place.

Second—Wages do not come out of the employer’s profits, but his profits come out of the wealth you produce. As with these paper workers, the workingman’s wages are fixed by supply and demand in the Labor Market. Free trade may force the boss to sell cheap; in that case his profits may be low. Or Protection may enable him to sell dear; in which case his profits will bound upwards. But either way it is your work which produced the wealth. Your wages remain as low as he can squeeze them, and he alone reaps the benefit of the Protection.

Let us have more such enfants terribles.

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

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