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EDITORIAL

IS THIS INSANITY?—NAY!

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE clause of the Underwood tariff bill that imposes heavy duties upon automobiles being before the House on April 30, and the Republican Representative Anderson of Minnesota having got himself badly tangled up on the subject with the Democratic Representative Palmer of Pennsylvania, the Republican floor leader, Representative Mann of Illinois, leaped to the rescue of his associate from Minnesota in denunciation of a prohibitory rate on “the poor man’s car”!

This is not the first instance, in Congress and out of Congress, when such seemingly brazen shamelessness has been uttered.

When in 1900 the debate in the Senate broke loose on the Ship Subsidy bill, fathered by Senator Frye of Maine, the Senator advanced as an argument in favor of the bill that the fare of the American sailor on American bottoms was “equal to the Delmonico menu.” Out of Congress the savings banks—ever more notoriously the asylum for the funds of speculators and of the comfortably fixed—are frequently seen referred to by bourgeois interests as “the poor man’s bank.” And now comes Representative Mann with the assertion that automobiles are “the poor man’s car.”

Are these utterances—the claim that the sailor’s hard-tack is equal to the Delmonico menu; or the claim that the savings bank, institutions from which the mass of the wage slave class is excluded, is the poor man’s bank; or the present claim that the luxury of the automobile is the poor man’s;—are these brazenly shameless words of insanity?

They are not,—unless in the sense that class-blindness partakes of mental derangement.

Representative Mann is not insane. Having failed in his repeated appeals to his Democratic fellow bourgeois, Mr. Mann frankly stated in the course of the debate

the very next day that he was “not appealing to the intelligence of some of the gentlemen on the other side.” What, then, was he appealing to?

To the bourgeois, whether he belongs to the “House of Lords,” or to the “Commonalty,” the working class does not count. The workingman is considered as non-existent in the social scale of the human, or social classes. To the bourgeois there are just two classes, the Top-Capitalist and the Middle Class Capitalist, or Small Fry. When the bourgeois speaks of “the rich” he means the Top-Capitalist; when he means the Middle Class he says “the poor man”;—the workingman is not “man,” at all; he is a “hand”; a necessary thing, like a dray-horse, a bronco that may sometimes have to be humored and patted, only that and nothing more.

Accordingly, when Representative Mann spoke of the automobile as “the poor man’s car” he was not shameless; did not mean to be. The people he had in mind were the middle class, folks whose “credit” is sensitive, a credit that the use and ownership of autos and other displayfulnesses tends to steady.

What was the Republican floor leader appealing to? He was appealing to the middle class; he was seeking to frighten his Democratic opponents with loss of votes. There was no insanity either in the purpose, or the means thereto.

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