

EDITORIAL

CONGRESSIONAL GLEANINGS— THE RAILROAD BILL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MORE than once, in the course of the debates in the Senate on the Railroad Bill, words were used to the effect that it was next to impossible to understand what was being done and undone.

If gentlemen who have had the handling of the bill from the start, were on frequent occasions in the course of its passage in the dark as to where they were at, there can be little wonder that, as reported on many sides, “lawyers are wiping their spectacles to study the bill, and look puzzled”; and there should be still less wonder if the “ultimate consumer” of the thing, the dear public, is wholly in the dark.

As to this “ultimate consumer,” he will never realize what it is he is consuming when that new railroad law is set in operation. But he will have to consume it: and it will not improve the digestive powers of his economic stomach.

Leaving the “ultimate consumer” aside, the new railroad law may be gauged not by what it declares but by the circumstances of its enactment.

At every turn of the debate it transpired that not a thing could be proposed that did not step on the corns of some Interest, supposedly “Vested Interest.” Seeing the old law was complained against for stepping upon a whole row of other Interests’ corns, the situation was this: Do what you may, amend or let alone, there will be Interests howling mad. Understanding this situation, it will become clear what were the lines along which the “stalwart” and the “insurgent” Interests moved.

Seeing there were violent objections to the old law, and perceiving that these objections could not be removed without injury to “stalwart” Interests, the “stalwart” forces made a dead set to gain greater advantages than their Interests already enjoyed. The disturbed condition that “insurgent” amendments produced raised dust enough to afford a chance for “stalwart” manoeuvres—the “stalwarts”

sought to profit by the chance. This accounts for the otherwise unaccountable boldness of their endeavor surreptitiously to effect the repeal of the anti-merger clauses by innocent looking “improvements.”

On the other hand, the “insurgents” whose Interests were hurt by the law as it was, and who expected to draw some of its teeth and claws, finding themselves threatened with additional teeth and claws, sought to be introduced under velvety appearance, grew suspicious of their own shadow—saw fresh mischief in every “stalwart” suggestion—and frittered away their energies. They accomplished little, if anything, in the way of improving the law: they felt happy if they succeeded in resisting fresh inroads.

The present bill is the net product of the above sketched opposite “plans of campaign.” Hence both “stalwarts” and “insurgents” claim the victory: the former, for keeping things substantially as before; the latter, for having prevented the “stalwarts” from making further raids into their Interests.

Such is the complexion of the “new” railroad bill.

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