

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: International Competition

In the last struggle between the shoe workers of England and their employers a new factor appeared, which necessitated a prompt settlement of the dispute, chiefly, of course, to the detriment of the workers, but to some extent also at the expense of the masters. This new factor was American competition. The British markets were suddenly flooded with American footgear, and as prices and quality seem to have been satisfactory to the selfish and unpatriotic classes that do not walk barefooted, it is by no means certain that the shoe manufacturers of England will in the future be able to repel similar invasions. Naturally, they will have to improve their machinery and “reduce expenses”—that is, cut down wages. Naturally, also, a cut-down on their side of the water will be promptly followed by a cut-down on our side, and vice versa.

Some weeks ago a not less startling announcement was made that American woolens had found a market in England. Although the manufacturing experts of Bradford had examined the intrusive goods most critically, and proclaimed to the world that they were a disgrace to the woolen industry in general and to that nation in particular which not only produces them, but never tires of referring with contempt to “European pauper labor,” it seems that there were in England people mean enough to actually buy and wear the wretched stuffs.

A similar sensation was caused a very few years ago by the first shipment of American pigiron to Great Britain. Since then

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vast improvements have been made here in the manufacture of steel, and the price of labor in that industry has suffered a great reduction. It is safe to say that unless Carnegie succeeds in soon establishing an international iron and steel trust, the American mills, fully protected in their domestic markets by the present tariff, and able, therefore, to keep up their prices at home, will furthermore be able to unload upon foreign countries, at ruinous prices to foreign competitors, the enormous surplus that they have the capacity of producing. Then the mighty iron trust, will or nil, must become a world-wide fact, with all its inevitable consequences to the miners and iron workers.

More surprises of the same character are awaiting those pure and simple-minded persons who, never looking ahead, constantly wonder at what strikes them. Leaving aside the products of American agriculture, crude or manipulated, which have long acted an important part in the modern economic revolution, we might name certain American manufactures—such as cotton fabrics, hardware, machinery, etc.—which have already to a more or less extent forced their way to {onto?} foreign markets, and will unquestionably now exert upon those markets a steadily increasing pressure. But without entering into further particulars it may be stated, in general terms, that there is hardly a branch of production in which America may not now or very soon threaten Europe with world-wide competition, necessarily ending in world-wide trustification.

We have obviously reached that point where, in the words of the May Day Conference, large national masses of labor will be hurled against each other in the international struggles of mighty capitalists, and where, therefore, International Socialism must fully emerge from national trade unionism.

Workingmen of all countries, unite!

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
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