

EDITORIAL

A PAINTING ON THE TARIFF.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE sentimental free trade Democrats in Congress—there are sentimentalists even among capitalist politicians—who are grieving beyond measure at the defections from the ranks of their party in favor of a protective tariff for some industry or other in their own districts, should study a certain picture, copies of which are frequently seen,—and also “look behind” the picture, study all that the picture tells.

It is a great picture. It represents Bismarck, the “Iron Chancellor” dictating at Versailles the conditions for peace with France to the French Commissioners Jules Favre and Adolfe Thiers. The Chancellor looks all iron. Favre leans with dismay towards Thiers. Thiers himself seems crushed, buried in a large arm-chair. But that is only one side of the picture.

Now let us look behind the picture, and around it.

Adolfe Thiers, together with his particular coterie, was interested in the textile industries located in the North of France. The textile industries located in Elsass and Lorraine were serious competitors with their northern France fellow weaving concerns. In the competition the one cut the other’s throat. The competition hurt the pockets of Thiers and his coterie. The “Iron Chancellor” demanded the annexation to Germany of the very districts that were crowding the Thiers textile concerns. Was this a blow to crush Thiers? Not at all. The Thiers, buried in the large arm-chair in the picture, and looking far away, was figuring mentally what a boon the Iron Chancellor’s demand was to him and his coterie. With the textile industries of Elsass and Lorraine under a foreign flag they ceased to be competitors with the Thiers establishment. The tariff wall could be raised against them. Done!—and big were the profits derived by the Thierites.

There is no such thing as principle; no such thing as patriotism to the level-

headed capitalist and his politicians. The Thiers factories' stocks shot up. That was worth the dismemberment of France to him. The "sublime principle" of free exchange can go to the dogs at any moment if the free trader has an industry from which a tariff promises to draw larger revenues. The "patriotic principle" of protection vanishes like vapor at any moment if the protectionist is interested in an industry from which free trade promises to yield him a larger swag.

The picture in question should be studied—likewise the economics that hang thereby.

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