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EDITORIAL

“UNEARNED INCREMENT.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHO would have thought it that landlordism, that crustified symbol of reaction, would have produced a battle cry of priceless value to Socialism? Well, the miracle has happened; and Germany is the land in which the miracle happened; and the German Junker is the performer of the miracle. If that is not heaping miracle upon miracle, nothing is.

The term “unearned increment” has had exclusive application to the plunder pocketed by the landlord. Rent, a social product, earned by none but yielded by combined society, is the property of the landlord only. As society jointly labors, jointly breathes, jointly occupies space—above all, as society jointly multiplies, its social product, rent, increases, and the increase flows steadily, securely, increasingly, singly into the landlord’s sole pocket. With gathering years the social eye gained in power and penetration. Rent was perceived to be an increment unearned; it became known as THE unearned increment. The landlord’s wealth became, as a consequence, an object of general attack.

In the camp of the attackers the capitalist elbowed himself into a leading position. When landlordism was mentioned he became positively revolutionary; the word “landlordism” had upon him the effect of a red rag waved before a bull. The capitalist strutted forth to deliver battle to the landlord Dragon. He, capitalist, worked; he, capitalist, produced; he capitalist, earned his increment; but the landlord, the idle landlord, the sponge landlord, the—in short, the “landlord” (the word comprised within itself all the bad adjectives in the dictionary), he lived on unearned increment. He is not entitled to it; it must be taken away from him; it shall be taken away. A budget, Herr von Sydow’s budget, was to do the trick. A tax on estates, on their inheritance, on their income was proposed.

The argument seemed formidable, well joined, solid. When, lo, and behold, it

crumbled like a card-house over the ears of the capitalist architects. It crumbled with a single blow. Who administered the blow? The Junker. In what did the blow consist? In a short, simple, neat formula: “If OUR increment is to be taxed because unearned, then, likewise must the increment derived from sales of stocks be taxed—it also is unearned.”

The beauty because power of Truth lies in its being self-luminous. As the lightning {lightening?} that goes out of the East is seen even unto the West so is the true word felt when uttered. The truth embodied in the Junker shot is irrepressible. The capitalist indignation at unearned increments stands exposed as a “stop thief!” cry. Attention once called to the unquestionable unearnedness of the capitalist’s increment on the sales of stocks, the further secret stands forthwith uncovered that all the rest of the capitalist’s increment is unearned—earned by Labor and sponged up by Capitalism in ways and methods that bear so close a resemblance to those of landlordism that the whip which scourges the landlord’s back can not but gash the back of his fellow plunderer, the Capitalist.

Well for the Junker! Some believed the Junker’s mission in the scheme of society had long been performed. They erred. It has been completed only now when he yanked the capitalist down, and placed him alongside of himself in the social criminal’s dock.

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