

EDITORIAL

BERGER'S MISS NO. 18 — DISGRACEFULLEST YET.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ON July 31 Victor L. Berger dropped a bill into the basket at the Speaker's desk. The noiselessness of the dropping was made up by the noisiness of the claims that Berger immediately set up for his bill through private interviews.

The bill was, by these means, announced as a "pension bill for the veterans of the industrial war." In its behalf it was, by these same means, argued that the pensioning of soldiers being legitimate, for all the more reason should the "soldiers of industry" be taken care of—many more of these than of the others being maimed and killed on the battlefields of industry, and their services being vastly more valuable to society.

Nor were the high expectations, raised by this correct statement of the exalted posture of Socialism towards the soldiers of industry, left to rest wholly upon the loftiness of the goal. They were raised still higher by the method, which (likewise by the means of private interviews) it was pointed out and enlarged upon with which the bill guarded itself against bourgeois assault. That method was drastic and extreme: it went the full length of extremity and drasticness that the Constitution allows: and it was backed up and justified by a drastic and extreme precedent to match—the act of Congress of March 27, 1868, forbidding the Federal Courts to pass upon the validity of the reconstruction laws which it had enacted after the Civil War. The Berger Pension Bill expressly forbids the exercise of jurisdiction by any of the Federal Courts upon the validity of the act.

In short, here was a goal set up, than which none more lofty under capitalist rule,—provision for the soldiers of industry, men and women, who, delivering daily battle on the firing line of industry, at the risk of health, limb and even life, physi-

cally and mentally feed, clothe and home the Nation. Here was a means, than which none more determinedly manly,—the emulation of Congress in an action taken at that most critical parliamentary crisis in the Nation's existence, when the rebel buffoonery of the then President by accident, Andrew Johnson, and the encouragement that that gave to rebel intriguers, threatened to undo with legal manœuvres the achievement just sealed at Appomattox.

With such a goal and such a means to match, Expectation soars—but soars only to droop and drop plump down.

First—the pension is to accrue only after the veteran's 60th year.—The average life of the American soldier of industry is barely 40, a fact well known to, and reckoned with by the railroad and other capitalist concerns that force their employes to join the insurance clubs which these concerns set up.

Second—the pension is to be forfeited by a conviction of felony.—The disqualification is sweeping. Whatever action a bourgeois Court pronounces felony is to be felony. No distinction between acts of moral turpitude, and honorable, class-conscious acts, which, in a spirit of revenge, the bourgeois Courts stamp felonious and punish as such. Preston, who, under all law “human and divine,” asserted his right to life against a murder-minded and murder-armed bourgeois; Smith, his associate, and for which association alone he was convicted, along with Preston, by a Pinkerton jury; and both of whom are now in Nevada's felons' cell;—neither of them, and along with them, many more of Labor's champions, past, present and to come, “need apply.”

Third—the pension rolls are closed to him or her who, though 60 years of age, has a weekly income of \$6.—Those rare survivors of close to two generations of unrequited toil, during which they sweated and bled an abundance of wealth into the coffers of the Capitalist Class—those rare survivors, who, perchance, pinched themselves during two generations of toil and whose savings now may yield them the weekly pittance of \$6; or who, more probably, are still on the firing line of industry from which they fetch some crumbs that enable them to hold the prohibitory \$6-yielding property;—they, all of them, are to be left out in the cold.

Fourth—no pension for the orphans of the toilers, male or female, whose occupation has, either indirectly, by undermining their health, or directly, through any

of the numerous “accidents” on the firing line of industry, sent them to early graves.

Fifth and last, and, if possible, worst of all—the “lucky” ones (we mean no unseemly joke at the expense of these martyrs of Capitalism on whose backs the Victor L. Bergers have joined the capitalists in “practicing upon the dog”), the “lucky” soldiers of industry who have escaped death before 60, and who can filter through the excluding provisions of the bill, they are to be remunerated with the bountiful maximum amount of 57 cents and 14 mills a day (\$4 a week), or the minimum amount of 14 cents and 29 mills a day (\$1 a week). Sixty years of toil and poverty that yielded affluence into the coffers of the Capitalist Class are to be rewarded out of those same coffers with the crust of an average 35 cents and 73 mills a day (\$2.50 a week)!

Such a bill, if it came from an outspoken bourgeois, would confirm the Socialist maxim that “Charity is to steal wholesale and return retail.” Coming in the name of Socialism, the bill is an insult to Socialism and to the Working Class alike. It is an insolently insulting bunco game of “big boast, and small roast.”

Since this special session of Congress began and down to date, the “first and only Socialist in Congress”—with just one exception for which, anxious to stretch a point in his favor, we allowed him credit—has done literally nothing but “miss stays.” On June 14, when Mr. Berger, in his first and, so far, only speech, made the lamentable exhibition of Socialism that he made on that day, even to the point, as shown in the 8th article of this series, of speaking about raw materials as “social tools,” the hope arose that the gentleman had “touched bottom.” The hope was unwarranted. Deeper depth was reached on July 31, when the pension bill was introduced, and the trumpet blown over it by its introducer into reporters’ ears.

With the exception of June 14 and July 31, Socialism was exhibited in the House dumb and craven; on June 14 Socialism was exhibited as ignorant; now, on July 31, Socialism was exhibited as shoddy.

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