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EDITORIAL

BERGER'S MISS NO. 20.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A MATTER entirely foreign to pensions—the appeal of one of the House employes for reinstatement—being wrangled over in the House on May 26, the subject of pensions did somehow intrude itself.

Pensions is a subject matter of many fascinations for our bourgeois Congressmen. To one set the subject affords golden opportunities for Jingo speeches on all that “the country owes to the dauntless defenders of the flag”; to another set the subject is the occasion to look wise and circumspect, to warn against extravagance, and to display much detailed knowledge of Treasury affairs; to still another set the mere word “Pensions” is like the waving of a red rag before a bull. It opens the sluices of many ugly digs at “Carpet-Bag Rule” and other morbid war reminiscences. There are still more sets, all differently affected. The long and short of the story is that Pensions is a subject that often bobs up unexpectedly, and forthwith holds the center of the stage.

It was so on this occasion. Turning up in the most casual manner, Pensions became the subject of debate. Ex-Speaker Cannon leaped to the fray. Retorts and counter retorts flew thick. Representative Isaac R. Sherwood, quoting somebody, accused the ex-Speaker of having stood ready, at the previous Session of Congress, to keep enough members of the Invalid Pension Committee away from each meeting to prevent a quorum. The ex-Speaker retorted that he looked his accuser “in his eye” and told him there was “not a word of truth” in what he said. And so it went on, until Representative Sherwood gave notice that the Democratic majority would at the earliest opportunity introduce a dollar-a-day pension bill; and, he added, banteringly addressing the Republican side of the House, “you will all vote for it.”

The sally restored good humor. It was greeted with laughter and applause. Small danger, under such circumstances, of the Members' class instinct sheltering

itself behind strict parliamentary forms. A dollar-a-day invalid pension? A dollar-a-day for invalid soldiers? Victor L. Berger should have seized the occasion by the horns, and promptly said:

“And I, Mr. Speaker, now give notice that, when that dollar-a-day invalid pension bill is introduced, I shall move an amendment to the affect that the bill extend to invalid workingmen, those veterans without whom all other veterans are as nothing; those veterans who have left eyes, legs, arms, fingers and the bulk of life on the Nation’s most deadly battle field—the mines, railroad tracks, mills, factories and shops, where they have fought unrequited, life-long battles to feed, clothe, house and otherwise support the Nation’s life.”

But Mr. Berger did nothing of the kind. That bugle call, sounding the note of the land’s proletariat’s interest and dignity, remained unsounded from the place and seat occupied by the “first Socialist in Congress.” It could be no otherwise. The “only Socialist in Congress” was at the time incubating the addled, egg of an average 35 cents and 71 mills a day pension bill for workingmen who performed the nigh to miraculous feat of reaching their 60th birthday.

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