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EDITORIAL

POINTING TO BERGER IN ANSWER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

FROM an “onlooker,” as he describes himself, and certainly a thoughtful man, but who, we regret to say, insists that his identity be not disclosed, not even the town from which he hails, a long letter has been received in this office, the gist of which is contained in the following passages:

“I am, as you see, in full accord with the principles and the tactics also of the S.L.P., and I can not but regret there should be another Socialist party [the S.P.] of loose principles and of still looser tactics that has the element of strength that numbers give and that the S.L.P. still lacks. . . . I would despise myself if I were to say that the S.L.P. ‘knocks’ and ‘vilifies’ the S.P. . . . I wish long life to the S.L.P. and ‘more grease to its elbow.’ . . . The country needs that ‘pillar of fire’ to guide us out of Egypt into the Promised Land. . . . The S.P. is getting from the S.L.P. no more than is coming to it. . . . I would not have the S.L.P. withhold one blow . . . but is not the S.L.P. too strict in its judgment that the S.P.’s looseness of principles betrays such a lack of class-consciousness that it will prevent the growth of the S.P. toward the light?”

The selection of the consecutive passages quoted above eliminates all references to S.P. political and other acts of corruption. They are eliminated for the sake of clearness, the objective point of our correspondent being best indicated by the sentences quoted.

Is the S.L.P. too strict in its estimate that the class un-consciousness, which is typical of the S.P., switches that body away from the proletarian revolution, and fatedly lures it ever further and deeper into the quagmire of bourgeois reform?

Let facts speak.

The most conspicuous, typical, and esteemed member of the S.P. is Mr. Victor L. Berger. The gentleman’s very laches give tone to the point. An orator might captivate with his flow of language, and carry people off their feet in favor of things they do not quite approve of. Mr. Berger is no orator. No meretricious glitter of

rhetoric gilds his pills. What he stands for, what he does, stands forth unvarnished.

Now, consider two recent acts of this S.P. type

Mr. Berger's last act during the late special session of Congress was the introduction of a bill to pension people of 60 years and over who are needy. It is of secondary importance that the pension is the pittance of an average \$2.50 a week. The primarily significant thing in the present consideration is the age, seeing that the bill is heralded "in the interest of the veterans of labor."

Everybody knows that the workingman who lives to see his 60th birthday is an exception. Between their 35–45 year the average workingman in America has been knocked out, either by "accident" or by the slower process of overwork, underfeeding, and unsanitary conditions. The overwhelming majority of the 60-year old{s} in the land are bourgeois. It is the needy among these, the failures in the scramble for the workingman's skin, that Mr. Berger's Old Age Pension bill mainly brings solace to.

Socialist party officials often answer the S.L.P. charge, that their petty "labor demands" are in reality "labor betrayals," with the plausible answer: "We must live in order to carry out the revolution." The weight of the implied repartee that a live dog is better than a dead lion, is admitted. A \$2.50 a week average to the few 60 year old invalids of Labor enables them, however, not to live, but to die slowly.

Mr. Berger's Old Age Pension bill is a sop to Labor, under the hullabaloo of which sop bourgeois, not proletarians, are sought to be mainly benefited.

Take a more recent pronouncement.

In a signed front page article in his Milwaukee *Social Democratic Herald*, dated only last October 28, Mr. Berger charges the wealthy with shifting the burden of taxation upon the "working class" in these words:

"They [the wealthy] either buy up and bribe the tax assessors—a practice very common in Chicago, New York and other places—or they form Tax Payers' Leagues, as in Milwaukee. And with the help of some fools of the middle class who are willing that the capitalists should dodge millions as long as they can dodge a few paltry dollars—they cajole and overawe the assessors, to shift the burden upon the WORKING CLASS by unjust assessments—by over-assessing THE LITTLE PROPERTY OF THE WORKINGMAN and by under-assessing the property of the big manufacturer or big merchant."—The underscoring is ours.

The case is here clear and distinct. It is not the complicated case of "indirect

taxation,” so frequently availed of by ignorance, or chicanery, to make out that the working class, altho’ a propertyless class, does pay taxes. The case here presented is of direct taxation; it is the case of “assessors assessing”; it is the case of only actual holders of actual property; it distinctly states “the little property of the working-man”; and the conduct of the assessors whom the “big manufacturers or big merchants” are described as “cajoling and over-awing” is stated to result in the “shifting of the burden upon”—Whom? Upon the exceptional workingmen who owns assessable property? Why, no;—“upon the WORKING CLASS”!

The cry of sympathy here raised in behalf of the working class is of a piece with the move of sympathy with 60-year old workingmen.

Under the hullabaloo of bringing aid to the wage SLAVE CLASS, we have seen an Old Age Pension bill introduced by Mr. Berger that can, not in the remotest manner, accrue to the benefit of the overwhelming majority of the working class, they being wholly excluded by the age limit, and that can be of benefit only to BOURGEOIS mainly. And now, under the hullabaloo of wishing to redress a wrong done to the WORKING CLASS—notoriously a propertyless class—we see Mr. Berger again raising an issue that can affect only exceptional members of the proletariat, but that is vital to the middle class bourgeois in their struggle with the “big manufacturers or merchants”

Two points determine the direction of a line. These two points, in line with which is every single act of S.P. officialdom, determine the track, not that the S.P. is leaving, but that it is structurally switched upon. It is the track of the bourgeois, middle class interests and reforms, besides the bourgeois class method of falsely identifying its interests with the interests of the workingmen, and seeking to reach its aims under guise of promoting the interests of Labor.

Victor L. Berger, being the deus ex machina of the Socialist party, can such a party “grow toward the light” of the emancipation of the working class?

Not without the help of a surgical operation.

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