

EDITORIAL

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SOUTH BRONX PROPERTY OWNERS' ASS'N.

By DANIEL DE LEON

TO the South Bronx Property Owners' Ass'n.
Gentlemen:—

We find ourselves at great trouble to understand your letter requesting the assistance of this paper to cause the Legislature at Albany to prevent the installing of water meters in dwellings.

We know what water meters are: they are in the nature of gas meters, contrivances to record the volume of water consumed in a tenement. We also know what the effect would be of the installation of such meters in dwellings: it would cost a good deal to the landlords; whether that would amount, as you claim, to “a burden of two hundred million dollars or more to the real estate interests” we are not prepared to say, but matters not. So far there is no difficulty in understanding you. The difficulty begins when we reach those passages in which you pronounce the water meter scheme a move that “will fall on the shoulders of the poorest residents of the city,” and in which you appeal to us for aid in averting the water meter calamity in behalf “of the suffering poor.” The English of these two passages is faultless and clear; there seems to be no misleading typographical errors; and yet the passages look to us much like a “pi.”

If it is true that the water meter plan will have for its effect “to saddle the real estate interests of the City of New York with an additional burden of two hundred million dollars or more,” then, to the ordinary mind, the claim that the plan will fall “on the shoulders of the poorest residents of the city” sounds much like a contradiction in logic. If, on the other hand, the theory is that the hundred million dollars or more, which will be collected from the real estate interests, will be shifted by those interests to the shoulders of their tenants, then the appeal in behalf of “the

suffering poor” sounds much like a contradiction in sociology: the landlord class, whatever its virtues, is not noted for the virtue of solicitude for the shoulders of its tenants.

These passages may all be clear to you; to our unsophisticated mind they are unintelligible.

The *Daily People*, being the mouthpiece of the Socialist Labor Party, advocates the abolition of the conditions that breed the poor. For all this, all practical moves that, in the meantime, would relieve distress and render the poor all the fitter to overthrow the system which causes their poverty, are entitled to and have this paper's warm support. The S.L.P. does not reject a half loaf when it cannot get the whole loaf. But the Party has set its face like flint against any proposition that looks like a half loaf but is only a stone—of no use to the working poor.

The backs of the poor have been a broad promenade ground for all manner of property-holding schemers to march and reach their private goals. Unless and until you can reconcile the statements, that the water meter plan will cost the real estate interests a couple of hundred million dollars, with that other statement, that the burden of the plan will fall upon the shoulders of the poorest residents of the city, unless you do that and until you do we have no choice other than to conclude that your Association is attempting to step upon that proletarian-backs promenade, and upon your appeal for our aid as an invitation that we join the procession—an invitation that we decline.

EDITOR DAILY PEOPLE.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded April 2011

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