

EDITORIAL

## BERGER'S MISS NO. 9.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**I**F ever a man himself put his own head "in chancery" it was Representative Julius Kahn of California when, Victor L. Berger having delivered his maiden speech on June 14, he started to interrogate him. If ever a man had another's head "in chancery" it was Berger on that occasion.

Kahn was the first to start the shower of questions, and he did so in cross-questioning style, which Berger met courteously. In the course of the cross-questioning, Kahn's purpose being to refute Berger's claims regarding the declining wellbeing of the workingmen, the Representative from California said:

"I know in my city of San Francisco the savings banks have deposits of \$159,000,000, which are the savings of the working people of that community."

Here was a head "in chancery"—the head of the capitalist maker of the statement, above all, the head of the brazenly false statement itself.

The claim, set forth by the labor-skinning bourgeois, that the millions and billions in the savings banks of the land are the "savings of the working people," has many a time and oft been demonstrated false in these columns. The demonstration has been made with the official figures of the Departments. Socialist Labor Party literature has demolished the claim. Neither in San Francisco nor anywhere else are the deposits in the savings banks "savings of the working people."

As to Representative Kahn's own San Francisco—

Representative Kahn gave the figures for the total deposits in the savings banks of that city. He abstained from stating the number of depositors. Without the



JULIUS KAHN (1821-1924)

figures on the latter head, the statement concerning the \$159,000,000 deposits in the 'Frisco savings banks being "the savings of the working people of that community" can not be tested. We are, however, not left dependent upon the Representative's omission. The number of depositors in the savings banks of 'Frisco can be obtained with sufficient approximateness elsewhere .

The latest report of the Comptroller of Currency gives the total deposits in the savings banks of the State of California as \$334,965,870.34. Representative Kahn's figures for 'Frisco are \$159,000,000. Accepting Mr. Kahn's figures as correct, it follows that the savings banks of San Francisco hold 47 per cent. of the total deposits in the State.—Stick a pin there.

The Comptroller of the Currency also gives the total of depositors in the savings banks of California. The figure is 420,172. Seeing that the deposits in the savings banks of 'Frisco are 47 per cent. of the total savings deposited in the State, the assumption is fair that the same ratio holds good with regard to the number of depositors. Forty-seven per cent. of 420,170 gives to 'Frisco. 197,480 depositors.—Stick a pin there also.

There is a third item needed—the number of wage earners at present employed in the mechanical and industrial occupations of San Francisco. The exact figures on this head are not accessible. Census Bulletin 101 for 1905 places the figure, that year, at 44,875. Stretching every point in favor of Representative Kahn, we shall accept the number to have since increased to 50,000.—Stick a there.

And now combine the three premises.

The conclusion is that, even if every single one of these 50,000 wage earners—men, women and children—even if every mother's son and daughter of the lot were a depositor in the savings banks of their community (a thing that not even so venturesome an individual as Representative Julius Kahn would venture to claim)—even then there would be 147,480 depositors, or nearly three times as many, who are not wage earners.

The final conclusion is obvious:

If, out of 197,480 depositors in 'Frisco, only about one-third are wage earners, then the total deposits can not be "the savings of the working people of that community." The share of that \$159,000,000 that falls to the working people shrinks

to about one-third—even supposing the un-supposable that everyone of the 50,000 wage earners were, indeed, a depositor.

When the scrutiny is carried on deeper and from still other sides, the fact is revealed that the day when savings banks were the banks of the poor is gone by. But the revelation from the above scrutiny is sufficient unto the day to demolish Representative Kahn's false figures. As in 'Frisco, so everywhere else. As everywhere else, so in 'Frisco, the amount deposited in saving banks by wage earners is a negligible quantity.

It can be expected of Mr. Berger, no more than of anybody else, that he should have been posted, on the spot, and in precise detail, upon these figures. True. What, however, could be expected of the "first Socialist in Congress," nay, demanded, was that he should have been found posted upon the principle in the case, upon the general facts and figures, and also upon the experience that the capitalist class and its mouthpieces—lay and clerical, political, professorial and pulpiterial—the moment their false pretenses concerning high wages to the wage earners in mills, factories, shops and mines and on railroads, in short in all the productive and distributive occupations, are refuted, presto, take refuge behind the mists of savings in the savings banks. It is a sort of scuttle fish trick, by which individual low wages, and consequent poverty, is expected to be blurred by an alleged hugeness of collective earnings, and consequent affluence.

Berger had the floor when the San Franciscan, Berger having yielded to him for a question, made the brazen assertion regarding the \$159,000,000 deposits in the San Francisco savings banks being "the savings of the working people of that community." It was for "the first Socialist in Congress" to turn on the spot the tables upon the ranting bourgeois politician with two questions in rapid succession:—

"What is the number of depositors in your San Francisco savings banks?"

Mr. Kahn, who introduced his assertion with "I know," who, accordingly, spoke as "one who knew," can hardly have tried to dodge the question. Had he tried to do so, instinctively scenting where he was to land, then the falseness of his reasoning would have needed no further demonstration, and Berger could have dismissed him and his statement in disgrace. More likely, Mr. Kahn would have answered the question with substantial accuracy. The second question should then have followed

instanter:—"And what is the number of the wage earners in 'Frisco, employed in mechanical and industrial occupations?"

The second question would have clinched the first.

If again Representative Kahn had given the figures with substantial accuracy, then the fact would stand revealed that, even if all the 50,000 wage earners of 'Frisco were among the 197,480 depositors the by far larger portion of the \$159,000,000 would not be the property of the working people.

If, however, Representative Kahn, by this time perceiving the hole he had got himself in, became rattled, he would have done one of two things:

Either, timidly lowered the figure of wage earners below the actual number—in which case the consequence would have been to increase still more the already by far larger portion of the \$159,000,000 which the wage earners do not own.

Or, grown desperately reckless, desperately increased the figure of wage earners above the actual number—in which case, inversely, Mr. Kahn would still have exhibited a larger portion of the \$159,000,000 as belonging to others than the working people.

In any and all cases, the fact stands out clear as a pike:—contrary to Representative Kahn's assertion, the \$159,000,000 in the savings banks of San Francisco are not "the savings of the working people of that community." The overwhelming majority of them are kept down by capitalism with nothing to "save" from. Whatever shoot the bourgeois podsnap Julius Kahn had elected to take, he would have found himself in the plight of a toad nailed to a barn door—at the mercy of Berger—the head of his mischievous falsehood staved in, in plain view of the bourgeois whom the falsehood is intended to back up, and of the proletariat for whom the falsehood is intended as dust in the eyes.

The hare, in hunter's parlance, having run up the legs of the Socialist hunter; the contestant having, in boxers' parlance, run his head into chancery with the Socialist boxer;—did the "first Socialist in Congress" turn to account the providentially tendered opportunity? He did exactly the opposite.

Upon Representative Kahn's preposterous assertion that he "knew" in his own city of San Francisco "the savings banks have deposits of \$159,000,000, which are "the savings of the working people of that community," Berger's immediately

following answer was —“Yes.” And the shameful “Yes” is no wise mitigated by the rest of the sentence—“and I know that you have had more strikes and more hell in San Francisco than in any other city I know of except Chicago.”

The “Yes” was in contradiction to the statistics in Berger’s speech showing a decline of wages. That “Yes” was tantamount to a retraction of his assertions regarding the lowering status of the Working Class. If the proletariat of San Francisco can be possessors of \$159,000,000 of savings, then the “strikes” and “hell” in that city differ not in kind from the “hell” that capitalists raise against capitalists, the fraternal swine-rend-swine “hell” in the capitalist brotherhood in which, it is the capitalist contention, Brother Labor has his place beside his Brother Capital.

To the shame of the Socialist Movement, “the first and only Socialist” in Congress made an unconditional surrender to capitalist theory, capitalist false figures, and capitalist false reasoning, when victory and the utter annihilation of all these was in his power.

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