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EDITORIAL

BERGER'S MISS NO. 22.

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UNDER the rules and usages of the House of Representatives it happens not infrequently that one or other of the two "floor leaders" allows a few minutes of his time to some Member who wishes to say a few words on something or other not relevant to the matter before the House, and that would not otherwise have an opportunity to be heard. As a rule, such a privilege is granted upon a matter that is considered of no importance, and it is not granted when anything of importance is before the House.

In keeping with this practice, on August 7, the House having under consideration House concurrent resolution 3 to print and bind 17,000 copies of the proceedings upon the unveiling of the statue of Baron von Steuben in Washington last December, the Republican floor leader, Representative James R. Mann of Illinois, yielded 10 minutes to Representative Victor L. Berger, which time, afterwards extended to five minutes more, Mr. Berger consumed in reading his arguments in favor of his Old-Age Pension bill. The paper read by Mr. Berger was withheld from the *Record* of that day (for improvement?) and appeared two days later, in the *Congressional Record* of August 9, neatly subdivided under captions.

Mr. Berger's Pension bill, itself an insult to the proletariat and to Socialism, has been dissected in a previous article. One turns with anxious expectation to the speech. Will it, perhaps, make up in argument for the radical worthlessness of the bill? No. The "speech" is a repetition of the worthless arguments with which Mr. Berger had, a week before, explained his bill to the reporters.

A fit companion-piece to the bill, the "speech" is an egregious miss.

"On the farm," the speech argues. "it is comparatively easy to take care of the aged." How so? The reason only increases one's amazement. "There is plenty of room on the farm. And even old people can usually do some chores—enough to make up

for the slight expense of their keep. It is thus no special hardship for their friends and relatives to take care of them.”

Socialism stands on facts and reason. This argument flies in the face of both.

Between the farm and the city, the aged proletarian finds the farm a hell compared to the city. Of what earthly use to him is the “plenty of room on the farm” when the farm with that plenty of room is not his? So far from the “plenty of room on a farm” being an advantage, it is a positive disadvantage to the proletarian. The openness of the fields offers no obstacles for the dogs, set upon the “tramps,”—the insulting term that, in rural-feudal parlance, is applied to the unemployed, and the looker for work—to see and reach their victims, and chase them away. What with that, and the inevitably feudal exercise of governmental functions by the rural property-holders themselves, the poor proletarian, especially when aged, is on the rocks in rural districts, without even a hole to creep and hide in, as the city offers. To give the palm to the farm above the city, as far as aged workers are concerned, may tickle the palates of the “Milkmen,” the dairy property-holders of Waukesha county, whose vote, by counteracting the heavy loss of Social Democratic votes in Milwaukee, helped for the nonce Mr. Berger over the stile into Congress; but the tickling of those palates is an act by which Socialist clarification suffers.

Bad as this break is, worse, if possible, is the argument of the number of people whom the bill would benefit.

Mr. Berger estimates the number of persons more than 60 years old in 1910 at 5,800,000. That among these there are people three score years of age who do not belong to the proletarian class Mr. Berger realizes. How does he ascertain the number of the aged proletarians? Deducting 1,000,000 from the 5,800,000 as “foreign born or not citizens 16 years,” he has 4,000,000 left. Of these 4,000,000 he considers 2,765,000 to be proletarians entitled to his proposed pension—in other words, a majority of the 4,000,000 persons more than 60 years old in the land are proletarians—in other words, a bouquet is thrown at capitalism.

Not so does capitalism treat its proletariat. The ripe old age of 60 is not theirs but as a comparative exception. Grey hairs, and not premature greyness, but the greyness of old age, is a badge of the property holding class. Long before the age for grey hairs arrives, death overtakes the majority of the workers. The old men in

workingmen's districts and gatherings are rare; the old men in capitalist quarters and gatherings are conspicuously numerous. Not a majority, but a slim minority of "persons more than 60 years old" are proletarians—a damnable fact which betrays the cannibalic qualities of capitalism, and which "the first and only Socialist in Congress" not only knows not enough to expose, but helps to cover up.

Mr. Berger's 15 minutes being over, the House turned its attention back to the virtual pension of the memory of the Baron—a providential contrast between the generous manner that the Capitalist Class remembers its own in, and the niggardly plaster with which pure and simple Socialist politicians seek to cover the big, capitalist-inflicted sore on the proletariat body.

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