

EDITORIAL

CATASTROPHICAL BERGER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WAS it yesterday, or day before?—surely it was no hundred years ago, that Victor L. Berger, quoting Engels' correct dictum to the effect that the Commune disaster proved the day had gone by for purely physical uprisings; but misapplying Engels' words to the "Milwaukee Idea" of introducing the Socialist Republic by one-step-at-a-time public lavatories and such-like measures, denounced the well balanced and sane Socialist Labor Party posture that the Socialist Republic, as with the birth of a child, was to be born a complete entity, and not piece-meal. That was only yesterday, or, perhaps, day before. Of a sudden Berger appears in a signed article in his *Social Democratic Herald* calling upon the discontented to provide themselves with "a good rifle and the necessary rounds of ammunition," on the theory that "the ballot may not count for much at a pinch."

Like all changes that are sudden they carry the changee beyond the mark. The Milwaukee arch-conservative tactician has become all at once a catastrophist.

Whatever somersaults (backward or forward) one may have expected from Berger, there is just one somersault that surely none was prepared to see from him, a gentleman, born and brought up in military Germany.

Travelers to Europe are frequently heard to make the remark that "Germany's system of compulsory military service has done no end of good to the German physique." The travelers might add—"and no end of good for the Social-Revolution." Compulsory military service has bestowed upon the countries, in which it prevails, two priceless boons: it has schooled the masses in the use, not merely the individual use, but the still more important, the collective, or military use of the gun; and it has bestowed upon them the correlative boon of sobriety in the use of the word "revolution," meaning "armed revolution." This is especially the case in Germany.

Everybody who knows what he is talking about, when he refers to "armed

insurrection,” knows that guns are suicidal weapons in the hands of those who do not know how to handle them; and that, the more of such people gather together, only all the larger is the massacre of themselves, partly even by themselves. Everybody who knows what he is talking about knows that the knowledge, necessary to turn the gun in collective hands into a weapon for triumphant aggression, is a knowledge not to be acquired over night, nor in the privacy of one’s closet. Finally, here in America, everybody, who knows what he is about, knows that the knowledge of the collective, or military, use of the gun is not among the public or civic virtues of the land. It is unnecessary, in this connection, to pursue the subject to the point of proving that the “virtue” is happily unnecessary with us, seeing that American capitalism has fashioned, for the ready use of all engaged in useful occupation, a mighty substitute for military power—the mold for the industrially organized class-conscious working class. Sufficient is the fact, because undeniable, that the knowledge of the military use of the gun is not among our national accomplishments. What friend of Berger’s would trust himself near Berger, for instance, holding a gun in his hands, especially if the gun is loaded, or provided with the “necessary rounds of ammunition”?

Perhaps it is a case of evil associations corrupting good morals. The blood and thunder language used by Berger’s associates, the Gov. Waites and such others, during the early days of Populism may have stuck to the gentleman. Such language is unbecoming a sober man. Berger should leave it to the potvaliant ranters in his party.

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

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