

EDITORIAL

## BERGER'S MISS NO. 24.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE Apportionment bill was under consideration in the House on April 27th. The gist thereof was that the number of Representatives be increased from the present 391 to 433.

The “two sides”—Democratic and Republican—were agreed upon the bill. When, however, the debate got well under way the spectacle—passing droll, in view of the all around agreement that the bill should pass—unfolded itself of extensive disagreement. Criticism and dissatisfaction cropped up from numerous corners; while the language of even the most loyal supporters of the bill was one of apology, rather than of aggressive defense. Evidently nobody was really satisfied.

Representative William C. Houston of Tennessee, in charge of the bill, argued, correctly enough, that a legislative body should not be large, lest its unwieldiness render deliberation next to impossible. The present membership of the House, 391, he considered quite large enough. To increase the number by 42, he conceded, was a move in the wrong direction. But what help was there for it? If the desirable size of a legislative body was to be kept exclusively in mind, another evil would be incurred. The House was a *representative* body. Representatives could hardly represent constituencies too large and of diverse interests to be well acquainted with them. Already the constituency, over 200,000 population, of a Representative to Congress was by far the largest of any existing parliament—three, and four, and five times as large as most, about 50,000 larger than the largest of them, the German parliament. If constituencies were to be kept down to a reasonable figure, the number of Representatives to Congress would rise to unwieldy dimensions: if, on the contrary, the representation in Congress was to be kept down to deliberative size, then the constituencies would swell to a size unrepresentable by a Representative. The bill was a compromise between the two horns of the dilemma—it raised

the constituency slightly, to 211,877, and the representation in the House to 438.

Representative Edgar D. Crumpacker of Indiana, the leader on the Republican side for the occasion, opened the flood-gates of criticism. While accepting the theories advanced by Representative Houston, and stating his intention to vote for the bill, he also announced his intention of offering an amendment which, he claimed, would obviate the danger of Congress—ten years hence, when the 14th Census will have been taken, and when a still larger population will have to be considered—being confronted with the problem that confronts the present Congress, and, perhaps, yield to the pressure for increased representation. The purport of the amendment was that, under subsequent censuses, the Secretary of the Department of Commerce and Labor should divide the aggregate population by the arbitrary number of 433, and thus determine the number of Representatives that each State was to be entitled to.

The clumsiness of the proposition escaped nobody. From that moment on criticisms, objections and further suggestions followed thick and fast, till the kink was inextricable.

Against Representative Crumpacker's threatened amendment two sets of objections were advanced. In the first place, what Congress did, Congress could undo. To shift this year the trouble to the shoulders of a Cabinet officer, would not prevent Congress next year from reassuming the trouble. In the second place, the impracticability of constituencies excessively large was not met, on the contrary, it would be incurred and established. One Representative shouted, against the objection: "Where, Mr. Chairman, is the increase in membership going to stop?"

A still clumsier proposition came from Representative Swagger Sherley of Kentucky—to fix the ratio (size of constituencies) small enough and the total (number of Representatives) large enough so as to insure the States against the loss of membership in the House, ten years hence.

An even inept, because utterly childish, suggestion was that the difficulty could be obviated by rearranging the seats so that "the Members will be seated closer together and be brought nearer."

Nor did radical bourgeoisdom fail to air itself, and render confusion worse confounded. Representative James L. Slayden of Texas wanted to know why it would

not be “the wiser thing to have a constituency of 25,000 or 50,000 people,” and Ollie M. James of Kentucky declaimed against the idea of a small body being wiser than a large body, as “a doctrine upon which thrones have been built and monarchies sustained,” and as the “argument of the crown and the scepter.”

Was such a spectacle an instance of parliamentary ineptness? No. In most other instances of false reasoning on the part of our bourgeois lawmakers, the suspicion is justified that they know they are reasoning falsely, but their class interests compel them to play the hypocrites. In this instance, they were honest, honest on account of the density of their bourgeois ignorance regarding the issue that was “running up their trousers.”

The issue that confronted Congress was the death rattle of “Political Government.” The thing is being choked to death by its own swelling and ulcerating tonsils, so to speak. A legislative body can not be large, or deliberation ceases: a constituency of diverse and conflicting interests must be small, or it can not be represented. The cry, Where, Mr. Chairman, is the increase in the membership of the House of Representatives going to stop?—that cry is smothered by the counter cry, Where, Mr. Chairman, is the increase in the constituencies of diverse and conflicting interests going to stop? And vice versa. The reduction, and, therefore, the practicability, of the one, necessarily implies the increase, and, therefore, the impracticability of the other. At first, the incompatibility of the two institutions is not perceptible. The time presently arrives when, each rendering the other impossible, they cancel each other, and their joint product, “Political’ Government,” is at end.

It is no accident that, of all capitalist countries, the United States is that in which the irreconcilability of “representation” and “constituency” is first coming to a head. Of all countries, the United States is completest capitalist, hence, it outlines clearest on the horizon the approaching downfall of Class Rule Government; hence, also, it prescribes with parallel distinctness the organization of the Socialist or Industrial Republic and Administration, where, not constituencies, of DIVERS AND CONFLICTING INTERESTS, but constituencies of INTEGRAL INDUSTRIES are the basis and the source of representation—where, accordingly, the requirements for representative deliberation, and the magnitude of the constituency, do not run foul of each other.

During the discussion in the House the interruptions and interpolated speeches were frequent. In reading the report of the debate one anxiously hopes to see Victor L. Berger taking a hand. It was not even necessary to go through the formality of asking the “gentleman from So and So to yield.” Both the leaders in that debate—Houston and Crumpacker—who “controlled the time” were anxious for the fullest and freest expression of opinion to assist them out of the trouble. Without a doubt “the first Socialist in Congress” would have found no difficulty to secure from either “leader” at least fifteen minutes, during which to throw light upon the situation inside of Congress, and outside of Congress, into the public mind—inside of Congress, to prove the futility of their paltry make-shifts; outside of Congress, to the masses addressed from that conspicuous platform, to urge on their organizing themselves industrially, that is, their getting ready the administrative constituencies of the approaching Future which are to take the place of the present less and less possible constituencies. But “the first Socialist in Congress” again, and in regulation form, was weighed and found wanting.

And how else could it be? Himself a pure and simple political Socialist, his mentality upon the subject was at a par with that of his bourgeois colleagues—neither he nor they having the remotest inkling of the governmental evolution that is undermining the “Political Government” and is raising the “Industrial Administration.”

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded July 2012

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)