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EDITORIAL

WIDOWS AND ORPHANS.

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FROM the discussion going on in the German papers on the budget proposed by Herr von Zydow taxing inheritances, it would appear that the Widow and the Orphan who, one time, were worked so hard here in America, are just now traveling in Germany.

Time was, here in America, whenever an official economist of capitalism felt himself driven from ditch to ditch, and disarmed, he quickly took refuge behind the Poor Widow and the Poor Orphan.

Was his argument about the “risk of capital” smashed with proof, much of it supplied by Ruskin, that risk was the one thing the capitalist class carefully avoided and the one thing it was insured against?—Out would the Widow and the Orphan be trotted. “Would you expose these to the struggles of a heartless world?” the Socialist was asked.

Was the official economist’s arguments that the profits of the capitalist were his “wages of abstinence” knocked into a cocked hat with proof that the only thing the capitalist abstains from is work, and that such abstention merits punishment, rather than reward?—Forward would the Widow and the Orphan be pushed. “What!” would the Socialist be asked, “would you have the Poor Widow and the Poor Orphan starve?”

Was the official economist’s theory, concerning the capitalist’s profits being his “wages of superintendence,” shattered with an avalanche of proof to the effect that, from top to bottom, the plants of production are superintended and run by wage slaves, and that all a capitalist did superintend was conspiracies against his fellow capitalists, how to cheat them out of the wealth they pilfered from Labor?—Instantly, were the Widow and the Orphan shoved forward. “Do you mean to say,” the Socialist was indignantly asked, “that you would have the Poor Widow

and the Poor Orphan beg their bread?”

And so at every step. Thus the Widow and Orphan were worked harder than any wage slave in any slave pen. They were worked in rain and in sunshine; workdays and holidays; no eight-hour day for them; theirs was work perpetual. Distracted with such hard treatment our Poor Widow and Poor Orphan must have fled abroad. Poor things! They but jumped from the frying pan into the fire when they landed in Germany.

The favorite argument of the German Junker against the proposition to tax the large inheritances is: “What would become of the Poor Widow and the Poor Orphan!”

The Poor Widow and the Poor orphan are, ten to one, twin sisters of the celebrated Mrs. Harris, to whom Dickens’s Sarey Gamp loved to refer in proof of her whoppers, and who Betsy Prig, with a boldness never to be sufficiently admired, one day finally declared she did not believe existed at all, at all. If, however, the said Widow and Orphan are really in the flesh, and not one of the numerous fictions in the Mother Goose of the Capitalist nursery, then the Widow and Orphan are truly proletarians; overworked beings; so truly proletarian that theirs is even the proletariat’s experience that migration does them no good—whichever place they migrate to is no better than the place they migrated from.

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

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