

EDITORIAL

## TARIFF AND WAGES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**U**P, again, is the thick dust of confusion that tariff legislation—whether upward or downward—blinds the popular eye with.

Some of this dust should need no consideration in this generation. Tiresomely stupid, stupidly tiresome is the argument that “we pay four and five times the wages that are paid abroad.” At best, that kind of argument can be used merely to illustrate elemental principles of abstract reasoning—the faultiness of one-legged arguments, or half-truths—the irrelevance of higher wages here, the statement being unaccompanied with the allegation that the productivity of Labor in America, where wages are higher, is no greater than the productivity of Labor abroad where wages are low. That sort of dust may be allowed to “settle” itself. But there is another sort of dust that is of vastly more serious nature. This sort of dust is the statement that, if the tariff is lowered and prices drop, wages must also drop.

This particular dust is particularly suffocating. Why?

In the first place, it is the cue of every demagogue with his line out to hook workingmen’s votes, declare that “Labor the taxes.” The demagoguery is used alternately by Republicans and Democrats and all the time by spell-binders of the Hillquit-Berger-Spargo party named “Socialist.”

When Democrats want to levy a tax on incomes, up jump the Republicans, “in the interest of trampled-down Labor” to warn that the proposition is a burden upon Labor, because “Labor pays the taxes.”

When Republicans pile up tariff duties, Democrats leap to their feet “in the interest of trampled-down Labor,” to inveigh against the tariff as a burden upon Labor, because “Labor pays the taxes.”

When Democrats and Republicans apply for the suffrage of the people, the

spell-binders afore referred-to of the Socialist party seek to thwart their competitors with the argument that they [Reps and Dems] heap up taxes, a burden upon Labor, because “Labor pays the taxes.”

If Labor pays the taxes, then, the tariff taxes being heavily cut down, the burden of taxation, which Labor is alleged to bear, must be proportionally lightened. As a consequence, a proportionally lower scale of wages should leave Labor unaffected, for better or for worse. Nevertheless, the very Republicans, who, at one time, sympathetically point to Labor as the tax-payer, are, at seasons like the present one, when tariff reductions are on the political anvil, the very first forthwith to put their foot into their mouth with scalding tears for the workingmen who will have “to starve” with wages lowered, in keeping with the lower tariff schedules;—and Democrats, along with Socialist party demagogues, are suctioned into, and flounder in the whirlpool of the dust.

The tariff should be lowered; it should be hacked down; it should be abolished, leaving no trace of itself behind, except portage charges, which are not really tariff duties. The tariff is “discrimination”; it is favoritism; it is “class legislation” in the sense of “step-paternalism.” While the tariff is not the cause, it is an accessory of economic and political despotism. Matters not that Woodrow Wilson’s program mistakenly attacks the tariff as a cause. The program will trim many a claw and many a fang in Despotism’s paws and jaws. That is the legitimate work of the bourgeois reformer, in the best sense of the term,—therefore it must be work that is aidful to the militant Socialist in the field. Is Woodrow Wilson’s program aidful to the Socialist party’s spell-binders? Just the contrary. Their 13-years long propagation of the economic error that Labor pays the taxes throws them upon their beam-ends; by as much as these gentlemen have laid emphasis upon “taxes,” by so much have they neglected to drive deep the piles concerning the economic fact that wages depend upon the ever increasing supply of labor-power in the market;—by so much have they blurred the principle from which Labor’s emancipation proceeds;—by so much are they and their mis-educated audiences now washed out and away from the line of Socialist battle.

Many are the events that bellow into the ears of the Socialist party’s Officialdom-and-Press: “Pack off, and get out of the way!” The latest Event to happen, and

to do the bellowing, is Woodrow Wilson's tariff program, together with the cyclonic discussion that has already started on the program's effect upon wages.

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