

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 2, NO. 216.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1902.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

RESPECT FOR THE DESERTFUL DEAD.

By DANIEL DE LEON

BY a unanimous vote, the Committee of Ways and Means of the House of Representatives is to report a bill repealing almost wholly the Spanish war revenue taxes, making a total annual reduction of \$77,000,000. This is equivalent to an announcement of the death of the Spanish war taxes. It is with feelings of profound respect that the Socialist hears the announcement.

Wags have many a time declared that a Jay Gould does more for Socialism than all the Socialists combined. It was a humorous way of expressing the view embodied in the saying, "The best landlord is the worst," or in that other "the best way to repeal a bad law is to enforce it." But apart from the waggishness of such expressions the plane on which they correctly place the "Jay Goulds," the "best landlords" and the "bad laws" is one that disqualifies them from being entitled to tokens of respect. One does not respect the evil-doer who achieves good despite himself. It is otherwise with the Spanish war tax. It worked no evil: it achieved, or was the occasion for achieving, immeasurable good.

Were it not for the Spanish war tax, the American Labor Movement would still be exposed to, perhaps, the most dangerous lure of the many calculated to sidetrack it, and to keep it to the ignoble role of cat's-paw for the capitalist "reformer." Nothing sounds so plausible as that "Labor pays the taxes." The statement seems to flow naturally from the Socialist principle that "Labor produces all wealth." It almost has a revolutionary ring. When uttered by the capitalist politician it, accordingly, could not fail to captivate. It regularly entrapped the workers. And that was its only purpose. The Spanish war tax gave occasion for the fraudulent slogan to be revived; and, as that bait caught the hare-brained gudgeons who had been masquerading as Socialists, and who, with Marx on their lips, had never read, let alone understood him, the slogan furnished the opportunity for the Socialist Labor

Party to grapple with the fallacy and fraud. It was grappled with in a way that it never was, or could have been before. The fur and the sparks flew. When the conflict was over, the fraudulent slogan lay torn to tatters, and the floor was strewn with the fragments of the false economics and traitorous tactics that had bolstered it up. The thinking element in the Labor Movement emerged from the fray intellectually purified. They perceived that, altho' labor produces all wealth, nevertheless, under the capitalist system, Labor comes into possession of but a small fraction of its product; they perceived that that fraction is determined by the supply of and the demand for Labor in the Labor market; they perceived that it is out of the lion's share of their product, which they were plundered of in the shop and which they never saw, that the taxes were paid; consequently they perceived that the capitalist alone was interested in reducing the taxes, taxes being a drain upon his plunder from the workers. Enlightened to that point, the thinking element in the Labor Movement recognized that questions of taxation concerned them not a whit. Emancipated to that extent from the intellectual thralldom of capitalism, they concentrated their thoughts upon the real issue—the abolition of wage slavery. Thus the Labor Movement in the land found itself a long step forward.

All thanks to the Spanish war tax! Upper and lower capitalists—bank depositors and “lager-bier” saloon keepers jointly with their capitalist brewery partners, etc., etc.,—were bled by the Spanish war tax; and while these variously sized vampires on the flanks of Labor were bleeding, the bleeder furnished the matchless opportunity for Labor to gain such insight into the question that it places the workers in a position infinitely stronger to resist the fraudulent slogan, when it again makes its appearance, than they ever were in before.

The Spanish war tax was desertful. The news from Washington tells us it is dead. As the hearse passes, the Socialists rise, and, with hats off, betoken their respect to the desertful dead.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded August 2006