

The People.

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SECOND EDITORIAL

SUMMING UP.

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About three months ago a number of applications were coming to this office from the State of Washington, from towns in Ohio and from places in this State for a reproduction of the "Uncle Sam & Brother Jonathan dialogue on taxation that had appeared in these columns about a year previous. The reasons given for the request were almost identical: the "reformers," acting as advance clouds of dust for the approaching Democratic party storm, were raising the cry of "Taxation"; the people, it was claimed by these elements, were crushed by taxes, the removal of which would be "a step in the right direction," besides being a practical move. Our correspondents realized the insidiousness of such claims, and wished to brace up their neighborhoods against the folly.

Indeed, in the whole gamut of capitalist dodges to confuse the working class and capture its vote, there is none in this country so insidious, plausible and bamboozling as the cry of "Taxation." The circumstance that Labor produces all wealth, and, consequently, is the sole supporter of the Nation, is used as correct premises and back ground for false conclusions. It is a case in which the jugglery of words is not readily detected. The "reform" and other capitalist political swindlers grant by implication the Socialist contention that Labor produces all wealth, whereupon they declare that Labor PAYS the taxes OUT OF ITS WAGES, and, thence point to the immediate relief that Labor would derive from a reduction of the "burden" of taxes: the taxes being lower, it is claimed by these people, the workingmen would have to pay so much less for what they need, and consequently would have so much more money left to buy things with. This Three-card Monte swindle forms, if not the ground work, yet the main stock in trade of the "Free trade," the "single tax," the "Good Government" movements. Against this insidious {insidious?} scheme of deception, the Party in this country has had to firmly put its face: the delusion was found to be a leading obstacle in the path of the propagandist in his work of educating the working class in class consciousness.

The false notion that the workingman could get instantaneous relief, not from a third, but from one of the Old parties, could not but act as a lure to draw them from the right course. Accordingly, the Party's literature teams with arguments against the fallacy: facts have been heaped upon facts, figures upon figures knocking down the under-pinning of the sophistry; and in its platform declarations the Party crystallized the scientific principle that wages do not depend upon taxation, but upon the law of values as applied to Labor in the Labor market; that taxes are paid by the capitalist class out of that portion of the wealth which the workers produce but are robbed of in the shop anyhow; in short, that all the jabber about taxes was a capitalist issue. In response to the pressing demands for the said "Uncle Sam & Brother Jonathan" making these points clear, it was reproduced on last March 5.

Two days later, March 7, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* published a one-column leading editorial dead against the essential principles expressed in that "Uncle Sam & Brother Jonathan." In that editorial attacking the principles stated by THE PEOPLE, the taxes were point blank declared to come from the wages of the working class, and the question of taxes was raised to one of importance to the working class, not only by reason of the preponderance of space devoted to it, but also and especially so by reason of the amazing statistics adduced,—the 55th Congress was claimed to have imposed a burden of fifteen hundred million dollars a year upon the people, and this was figured out to mean \$100 a year taken out of the wages of the average workingman's family.

No theory can stand without facts; theories must fit facts, not facts theories—at least with people qualified to discuss a question. Indeed, a theory is nothing but a deduction from facts: only in the measure that the facts are true and sufficient, and that the deduction is logical from such facts is it or the theory sound.

If a ship is claimed to be staunch, the staunchness of the ship is a deduction, and, in so far a theory. The soundness or unsoundness of the theory depends wholly upon the fact whether the ship keeps out the water, or whether she does not. If she does, the theory is sound; if she does not, it is unsound. Accordingly, if to the claim that a ship is "staunch" objection is raised, the theoretical discussion about her staunchness becomes secondary; the theory of her staunchness may be sparred with incidentally, but only as a preliminary to the real question—the question of fact; if the objection is insisted on, then earnest men drop theorizing and consider facts only; only triflers or ill-intentioned people would bite themselves fast in a

purely theoretic controversy. The real issue forthwith becomes one of fact—does the ship take in water or does she not?

The question of fact once turned to, it becomes a question of FACTS, that is, THINGS WORTH CONSIDERING, because only such facts can throw light on the theory of the ship's staunchness. Let, accordingly, the objector produce in substantiation of his claim a cup-ful of bilge water, and his "evidence" will be rejected. It is so trifling that it would not be even worth the while to inquire whether the cup-ful of bilge water that he produces is bona fide, or whether it is not a fraud; whether he really dipped it out of the vessel's hold, or whether he carried it into the vessel himself." De minimus non curat lex" (the law does not bother about trifles) is a principle not of jurisprudence only, not of biology and sociology only, it is a principle of common sense and common decency in debate. The objector to the theory that a ship is staunch, and who would come up with his cup-ful of bilge water as proof, would be roundly hooted out of court. When, however, the objector claims that the ship lets in tons of ocean water, then does he make allegations of fact that entitle him to a hearing, but that, at the same time, throw upon himself the duty of proving his allegations.

Applying these obvious principles to the controversy raised by the *Volkszeitung*, what do we find?

The *Volkszeitung* knew or felt full well that if it joined issue with THE PEOPLE, and sought to prove that the workingmen DID pay the taxes out of their own wages, by claiming that, since the 55th Congress, the "collar" on the workingman's glass of beer had become larger; that the packages of tobacco had been slightly reduced; that the number of prizes inside of these packages had become fewer; that patent cough medicines now cost a cent more; etc., etc.,—it knew or felt that if it adduced any such trifles as evidence it would be laughed at from the start and make no impression whatever. It felt that FACTS, and not trifles, were the essential basis for all theory, and accordingly it laid the foundation for its attack in the colossal figures of fifteen hundred million dollars of taxes, and in the detailed statement of \$100 taxes strapped on the back of the average workingman's family! This certainly was equivalent to saying that a ship, claimed to be staunch, was letting in tons of ocean water. Upon so stupenduous a claim as that, no theory, but facts must have the floor. Yet it has been impossible to get the *Volkszeitung* down to that. After shortly refuting its theory with theoretic utterances of Marx and Engels, we questioned its facts and pointedly pronounced its figures juggled,—yet it dodged the issue and sought shelter in a cloud of irrelevant theoretical dust. We

then pressed the point; gave condensed figures ourselves proving that the *Volkszeitung's* figures were false, the tax being less than one half what it claimed, and we proved that its facts were preposterous, that the tax laid on an article of consumption IS not paid by the consumer unless the price rises, and that the price of the articles of workingman-consumption had notably not risen;—yet still it dodged the point. The Party's German organ, the *Vorwaerts*, went into an elaborate examination of the figures, showing the scandalousness of the *Volkszeitung's* attitude;—but all of now avail; finding itself knocked out, the *Volkszeitung* has been burrowing deeper and deeper into and under abstractions, prevarications, and misquotations, and downright falsifications and trifles.

Summing up the discussion, this stands out unquestionably:

1. Upon a substructure of what it now knows to be false figures and falsified facts, taken bodily from some Democratic campaign document, and even preposterously inflated, the *Volkszeitung* published on March 7 an article the first two-thirds of which make direct agitation for the Democratic party; and, as a result, the last third of which makes direct agitation against the S.L.P.
2. In Germany, taxes often have a revolutionary effect. Not infrequently it happens that a tax on an article of consumption, beer or tobacco, is felt by the consumer the very next day in the increased price, and thereby produces veritable riots. We have been informed of instances where, in such cases, even the soldiers (German soldiers!) are seen joining the rioters, pulling out their short swords, digging up and paving stones with them, and using these as missiles. In such a country the tax question has a tactical value. The editorial management of the *Volkszeitung* do not realize that they are not living in Germany. Dominated by alien habits of thought, and protected with but skin-deep Marxism, the gentlemen throw overboard even the fundamental principle uttered by Engels to the effect that taxes are to the bourgeois of much, but to the working class of very little importance, seeing that what the workingman pays in taxes goes in the long run into the cost of production of labor-power, and **MUST BE BORNE BY THE CAPITALIST.**

A discussion with people animated so little by the intellectual force or rectitude would seem a waste of time. But not so. It has served to emphasize and re-demonstrate the correctness of the Party's attitude on the question of taxation and, at least, to weaken, if not break down, the evil effect upon the movement that the said scandalous article of March 7 would otherwise have had.

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As to the other issues raised by the discussion: the *Volkszeitung's* impudence of presuming to set itself above the Party; its defiance of the Party's official declarations, and, thereby of its own constitution; its suppression of the Party's voice;—these and many other kindred issues belong under a different head and will be duly treated in the fullness of time.

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

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