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ARTICLE

Capital and Labor United: Workers, Wages, and the Tariff in Late Nineteenth-Century Protectionist Agitation

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Abstract

This article explores how capital-labor relations were conceptualized in late nineteenth-century protectionist thought. Taking as an example the American Protective Tariff League (APTL), a national protectionist pressure group that was heavily influenced by industrial interests and attempted to popularize protectionist ideas by issuing newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets, and posters, it reconstructs the arguments protectionist industrialists used in their agitation targeted at industrial workers. Following the protectionist wage argument, the APTL made the supposed wage benefit to laborers in protected industries the center of their argument. This wage argument was strongly intertwined with nativist and Anglophobic stereotypes. Further, the APTL proposed a unity of interests between capital and labor in tariff matters that hinged on a nationalist interpretation of economic matters, in which the American national economy was conceptualized as being endangered by imports and competition from other national economies but simultaneously as a harmonious cooperation of capital and labor on the inside. Analyzing the organized labor movement's response to such claims, the article argues that this sort of agitation, while important to industrialists' arguments, probably had little influence on workers and their stance on the tariff issue.

Keywords: tariff; protectionism; labor movement; wages; Anglophobia

In December 1887, President Grover Cleveland, frustrated with Congress's unwillingness to compromise on any form of tariff reform, devoted the entirety of his annual message to Congress to a resounding demand for immediate downward tariff revision. "[O]ur present tariff laws, the vicious, inequitable, and illogical source of unnecessary taxation, ought to be at once revised and amended." The president attacked the system of high import barriers not just because he did not subscribe to the protectionist developmental philosophy at its core but also because he could not square the large federal budget surplus it created with his classical liberal concept of limited government. "When we consider that the theory of our institutions guarantees to every citizen the full enjoyment of all the fruits of his industry and enterprise, with only such deduction as may be his share toward the

careful and economical maintenance of the Government which protects him, it is plain that the exaction of more than this is indefensible extortion and a culpable betrayal of American fairness and justice."[1] With his message, Cleveland aligned the American party system around the tariff question and, in a conscious political move, established the tariff as the main subject of contestation during the following presidential campaign, in what came to be known as the Great Tariff Debate of 1888.[2] This debate permeated nearly all aspects of American politics and engaged Americans from all spheres of life in the ubiquitous discussions.[3]

By all means, the president's message represented a calculated affront to the tariff's (mostly) Republican defenders in Congress. Cleveland, the first Democrat elected to the presidency since James Buchanan, launched a full-frontal attack on the system of import tariff protectionism that the Republican Party had established during its continuous rule beginning with the enactment of the Morrill Tariff in 1861. Given the sweeping demands and profound criticism of the tariff system contained in Cleveland's message, it is remarkable that the president specifically exempted one group. Workers, Cleveland emphasized, should not suffer from the drastic tariff cuts he demanded. "[T]he reduction of taxation demanded should be so measured as not to necessitate or justify either the loss of employment by the workingman or the lessening of his wages."[4] The fact that even an ardent opponent of tariff protectionism like Cleveland regarded it as expedient to include this caveat in his otherwise unreserved attack points to the potency and pervasiveness of a ubiquitous trope in the American tariff discussions of the late nineteenth century: the protectionist wage argument. Protectionists of all kinds—wealthy industrialists, Republican politicians, and also some labor leaders—proclaimed repeatedly that tariff protectionism's main beneficiaries were American workers. Tariffs, they argued, secured jobs and high wages by protecting laborers against competition from low foreign wages.

Protectionists did not just canonize the wage argument in their campaign books and political speeches; they actively courted workers to join their ranks. While this tactic might seem reasonable for politicians seeking to build and enlarge popular support for their policies, industrialists' heavy involvement in agitational activities directed at workers—along with their emphasis on workers' benefits from tariff protectionism—is puzzling when contrasted with the fact that the labor disputes of the era consistently highlighted a fierce and fundamental conflict of interest between workers and industrialists. Beginning with the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, a wave of strikes and violent clashes, often referred to as the Great Upheaval, between discontented workers and their bosses, who were regularly supported by local, state, and even national authorities, put workers' dissatisfaction and their demands on the nation's political agenda: living wages, safe working conditions, and shorter working hours. The 1880s alone witnessed a total of almost 10,000 strikes and lockouts. Workers fought for a share of the enormous wealth that their hands produced, as well as a secure position within industrial capitalism; and, as the era's violent clashes demonstrated, the main obstacles to their declared aims were the opposing interests of their bosses. It was hard to escape the insight that capital and labor interests were in fundamental opposition to each other.[5]

In the late nineteenth century, the United States witnessed frequent, intense, and violent clashes between workers and their bosses while simultaneously hearing wealthy industrialists' claims that the tariff mainly worked in the interest of American workers. The simultaneity of these remarkably different patterns regarding capital-labor relations begs an explanation. Why did many protectionist-minded capitalists of the late nineteenth century make labor's fate the core and center of their argument? How did they reconcile the intense courting of industrial workers on the tariff issue with the unavoidable insight that capital and labor were in a clear and robust conflict of interest regularly demonstrated

to contemporaries by strikes, lockouts, and often violence? Why was their argument so pervasive in contemporary discourse that even as mighty an opponent as Grover Cleveland had to recognize its appeal? Moreover, what wider conclusions about Gilded Age elite protectionists' ideas about labor, its role in industrial society, and particularly its relationship to capital can be drawn from popularist agitation focused on and directed at laborers?

Scholarship on American tariff history is extensive and has, for the most part, recognized the crucial role the wage argument played in the work of nineteenth-century American protectionists. However, the argument is mostly noted in passing and often in reference to its use in the political arena, especially in campaign speeches and congressional debates.[6] A detailed analysis of how industrialists attempted to use the wage argument to bring workers into the protectionist camp remains a desideratum. Taking the American Protective Tariff League (APTL), a highly influential and industrialist-dominated protectionist interest group that functioned as the popular mouthpiece of elite protectionists as a case study, this article seeks to address this gap in the historiography. The analysis focuses mainly on the 1880s and 1890s when the tariff issue was most prominent as a national political topic. First, I introduce the APTL as a dominant political actor within the mainstream of late nineteenth-century American protectionism from which wider conclusions about the ideological and political nature of the protectionist wage argument, as it was presented by industrial elites, can be drawn. In the second section, I analyze APTL agitational material and attempt to reconstruct the APTL's vision of industrial labor relations with regard to the tariff question. The APTL, I argue, advertised high wages and protection from cheap foreign competition as protectionism's main benefits for workers. Beyond that, industrial protectionists also presented the tariff as a tool of social cohesion, an economic cure that could calm, and perhaps even overcome, the fierce clashes between capital and labor. In this line of thought, the tariff functioned as an economic device but also as a social and political tool that could be used to mediate and pacify contradicting material interests. In this way, elite protectionists' use of the wage argument as a rhetorical device to draw workers to their side mirrored the political strategy of the Republican Party, which used the tariff and the revenues it generated as a way to cohere and consolidate the broad and otherwise somewhat incoherent voting coalition that stood behind and benefitted from the Republican industrialization project. Finally, I contrast the APTL's ideas about labor and the tariff question with workers' reactions by analyzing organized labor's response. I focus on the positions of various labor groups and representatives such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the Knights of Labor, and socialist politicians including Eugene V. Debs. As far as it is possible to determine, only some segments of the workforce were receptive to the kind of protectionist agitation that the APTL disseminated. But even most labor protectionists remained skeptical regarding direct cooperation with industrialists, even when it served their interests.

Popularizing Protectionism: The APTL and Late Nineteenth-Century Tariff Agitation

The APTL, founded in 1885, was the most important public pressure group attempting to muster public support for protectionist policies beyond Congress in the late nineteenth century.[7] The League essentially functioned as a Republican campaign organization and worked in close contact with party officials. It published and distributed pamphlets, brochures, and books, engaged speakers, organized rallies, and maintained a national organization with state and local chapters. Moreover, the APTL published a weekly newspaper out of New York City, the *American Economist*, exclusively devoted to the promulgation of protectionist ideology. This publication contained political commentary

on current events, reprints of political speeches, responses to opposing views, information on tariffs and trade, cartoons, and news about the APTL. In addition, the League maintained a large network of local Republican-protectionist newspapers reprinting and circulating articles from the *American Economist*, thus ensuring a wide reach of the APTL's agitation. The League's headquarters were situated in New York City, a hotbed of free trade activism but also home to many of the APTL's members.

By its tenth anniversary in 1895, arguably at the height of the APTL's political influence and reach, 3,847 newspapers nationwide cooperated with the League. In the same year, the APTL had 955 members and 2,099 so-called correspondents, quasi-officials responsible for the local distribution of pamphlets. Despite the League's self-representation as a national organization, a closer look at the distribution of members and correspondents across the nation conveys a stark contrast between centers of support for the APTL and centers of its agitational focus. In 1889, for example, more than half of the members hailed from the Northeast, with roughly a third of members from New York State alone. A similar pattern can be discerned for the available numbers of so-called "Defenders," an advanced membership category that mainly contributed to the financing of the organization. The distribution of official correspondents, however, shows a remarkably different pattern. In 1892, only about 10 percent of correspondents were active in the Northeast, while more than half were in the Midwest and roughly a third were in the South.[8] As these numbers illustrate, the APTL found its base in the protected industries of the Northeast but sought to extend popular support for protectionist policies to other regions.

The APTL also served as a forum for private individuals with protectionist convictions, as well as interest-driven industrialists and Republican politicians. The organization's leadership consisted mainly of wealthy industrialists, mostly from protected industries,[9] along with high-level Republican Party politicians. These industrialists were also the main financial force behind the organization.[10] Given the composition of its leadership and membership, the APTL mirrored both the economic interests of certain branches of industry as well as the Republican mainstream position on the tariff issue. Fiercely, the League combatted any attempt at abolishing, lowering, or reforming import tariffs. Especially in the 1880s and 1890s, this type of radical protectionism was hardly challenged within the Republican Party. While industrialists, especially from the Northeast, were disproportionally represented in the APTL, nominally the League understood itself as a national organization that did not represent any specific segment of society or industry.[11] It is not possible to reconstruct the exact financial backing of the organization, yet it is clear that—despite frequent public efforts to deny such accusations—the APTL relied heavily on donations from wealthy individuals and companies to uphold its activities.[12] Members could join for an annual fee of $100, an amount large enough to effectively bar working- and even middle-class Americans from the organization.[13] Thus the APTL was, essentially, an elite organization.

The APTL did more than just talk and write about workers and the labor question. It addressed laborers directly and attempted to influence their thinking on tariff matters. The media for this agitation usually consisted of leaflets or pamphlets, which the APTL printed and distributed in the millions. With regard to this heavy focus on industrial workers, the APTL's agitation can be seen as popular. Given its elite backing and leadership, however, the APTL should not be misunderstood as a bottom-up manifestation of popular protectionist sentiment among the larger population, even if some of the League's publications might suggest differently. Rather, the APTL functioned as a popularist voice of orthodox elite protectionism.

It is this duality in purpose—an elite protectionist organization directing its agitation at the broader population—that makes the APTL a significant case study for analyzing the ways in which Republican politicians and industrial elites turned the tariff into a tool to draw broader sections of American society, especially industrial workers, to their side and into the Republican voting coalition. The APTL was not unique in this aspect, but surely it was the most outspoken and visible of the late nineteenth-century elite protectionist organizations attempting to win over workers.[14] As Richard Bensel notes, the importance of the tariff issue on a macrolevel lay less in its economic implications for the rapid industrialization of the American economy but mostly in its potential as a political tool to tie different social groups into a Republican voting bloc. By using tariff revenue to finance an opulent pension system for Union veterans, which comprised the largest slice of the federal budget in the 1880s, and by including goods such as sugar and wool in the list of protected items to extend the Republican voter base beyond the industrial centers of the Northeast and Midwest, the Republican Party effectively built its public support base around the tariff issue.[15] In extension of this logic, the popularization of protectionism among ordinary Americans, but especially industrial workers, can be understood as yet another cornerstone of this political strategy.[16]

Winning the Workers: The APTL's Labor Agitation

Leaflets and pamphlets, the quintessential media of the Gilded Age's populist campaign style, were also the preferred media of the APTL's tariff agitation. With their short texts, bold letters, simple but drastic language, and high circulation, these types of media best suited the aim of turning the tariff—an economic topic of immense complexity, yet somewhat alienated from ordinary Americans' lived experiences—into a hot topic of public debate. Many of the leaflets, published by the APTL under the label "The Defender," also contained explicit statements regarding circulation and target audience. They featured subsections such as, "A Short Talk to Workingmen," and requests like, "After Reading Hand to a Friend."[17] One leaflet was designed in a question-and-answer format giving concise and easily understandable "Answers to a Workingman's Questions."[18] In addressing workers, the pamphlets' tone oscillated between a form of assumed or appropriated camaraderie and a paternalistic attempt to educate workers from above by giving explicitly simplified explanations of complex economic matters. It was thus in media like pamphlets and leaflets—and, to a lesser degree, in newspaper articles and brochures—that protectionism was translated from an elite interest into a popular campaign issue.[19]

Wages were the core and center of the protectionist argument that the APTL offered to workers. Labor and wages were already central themes in the principles of the organization, as adopted in 1886. "The object of the American Protective Tariff League … is, by adequate duties upon imported products, to protect American labor, whether Agricultural, Manufacturing, Mining or Commercial, against the competition of low-priced labor in foreign countries."[20] Like most protectionists, the League proclaimed that the relatively high wages of American workers, and the resulting standard of living, critically hinged on sufficiently high import tariffs that prevented direct competition with low European wages. A typical pamphlet on "Wage Earners under Protection and Free-Trade" delivered a wage comparison between the United States and several European countries. It showed that U.S. wages were significantly ahead of the "starvation labor of Europe." The central message was plain and simple: "God save America from such wages!"[21] Another leaflet simply declared, "Free-trade and high wages in America is an impossibility."[22] Such slogans, as well as extensive comparison tables of wages and prices, were commonplace in

Figure 1. "Free Trade's Attack upon American Labor," cartoon printed by the APTL illustrating the supposedly disastrous effects of the Democratic Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894 on American Workers. *American Economist*, August 21, 1896.

pamphlets of the APTL, and they also featured regularly in the *American Economist*.[23] (Fig. 1)

The League's principles mentioned the wage argument directly but also refuted the claim that protectionism was responsible for higher living prices. "It [the APTL] maintains that cost of production and expenses of living are diminished and rates of wages increased, with the advance in the productive power of labor; and that the growth of this productive power depends upon the opportunities and rewards for intelligent effort afforded by a high standard of wages."[24] Another pamphlet, *English and American Wages and Pauperism*, similarly confronted the claim that high import tariffs significantly raised consumer prices. It presented a comparison of British and American wages as well as consumer prices, all showing American wages higher and consumer prices lower. Addressing American workers, it concluded, "We trust our wage earners will give these facts a little thought, and not allow Free-Trade falsehoods about advancing prices to make them overlook Protection truths about advancing wages."[25] A pamphlet, titled *Workingmen and the Tariff*, was even more extensive in providing "Facts and Figures for Wage

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Earners." It offered page-long tables and lists containing detailed overviews of the prices of specific consumer products in Britain and the United States. The pamphlet also informed readers about wage development in the two countries, again showing American advantages in both wages and consumer prices.[26] The pamphlet asserted, "The doctrine of Protection has here been vindicated by evidence which has all the force of demonstration. When assailed, it is assailed not by evidence, but by misrepresentation and abuse."[27] While it is difficult to examine the numbers' accuracy and even more difficult to ascertain their impression on potential readers, the prominence of statistics demonstrates a desire to substantiate qualitative claims with quantitative proof and thus illustrates the argumentative lure that statistics could hold even within the polemic pamphlet culture of the American Gilded Age.

Beyond merely denying that consumer prices were higher under protectionism, the APTL explained this development using a classic tenet of protectionist reasoning: internal competition. As protectionists had long declared, protective tariffs might initially grant the short-term advantage of lessened competition to domestic producers and thus briefly cause higher consumer prices. In the long run, however, these higher consumer prices would be leveled and even reversed by the rise of internal competition, enhanced technological development, and the market mechanism of supply and demand.[28] The APTL declared, "Prices of home-made protected articles may be enhanced for a time after the tariff goes into effect, but the advance is only transitory, for improvements in machinery, development of skill, system, competition, and economy, will ultimately overcome the augmentation of prices, and even reduce them below the lowest point ever reached while goods were supplied by foreign manufacturers."[29]

The wage argument, coupled with the repudiation of claims of higher consumer prices, constituted the core argument of the APTL's labor agitation. This prominence comes as no surprise; by the 1880s, the wage argument had already been a protectionist shibboleth for decades. Early American protectionist theorists, including Alexander Hamilton and Henry Carey, had stressed protectionism's potential for industrial development and, consequently, focused their argument on the developmentalist infant industry argument. In the Jacksonian period, though, when the tariff first became an extremely divisive topic of national politics, the wage argument rose to prominence in protectionists' reasoning.[30] Throughout the nineteenth century it remained extremely popular, with Republican politicians routinely attacking Democratic tariff proposals as "bills to reduce American wages."[31] The supposed wage benefits of protective tariffs were among the main policy proposals the Republican Party offered to American workers in the Gilded Age. It was included, in one form or another, in all Republican Party platforms between 1876 and 1900.[32] It was so pervasive that even the argument's eager proponents seemed at times bored of its notoriety. As early as 1880, the American Iron and Steel Association opened a pamphlet dedicated to informing workers about the topic of wages rather unenthusiastically: "That the workingmen of the United States have no cause to complain of the results of our Protective policy ought not to require verification at this late day, but occasionally a workingman may be found who has given but little thought to a subject which is to him of so much importance."[33] Especially during the Great Debate of 1888, the wage argument against European pauper labor was ubiquitous on the protectionist side and, as seen above, could not be escaped by tariff reformers like Cleveland.[34] It was a powerful political tool. (Fig. 2)

Nationalistic, nativist, and Anglophobic sentiments were strongly intertwined with the protectionist wage argument, and the APTL heavily exploited this xenophobic potential. As indicated above, Europe was the usual comparison point for American protectionists. European but especially British pauper labor, protectionists maintained, was a lurking danger to American wages, working conditions, and living standards. In many ways, this

Figure 2. "The Workingman's Stocking," cartoon from the magazine *Judge*, illustrates the protectionist wage argument by showing a John Bull doll as a Christmas present from Grover Cleveland to "American Workingmen," bringing "English Rates of Wages" and "Free Trade and Less Work." *Judge*, December 23, 1893.

idea conformed to the omnipresent Anglophobic stereotypes of the Gilded Age, which were especially notorious among American workers.[35] Yet Anglophobic attacks were not just a concession to general contemporary sentiment but also a specific characteristic of American protectionism. Since most post-Civil War American free traders looked to Great Britain as a role model and some also openly affiliated themselves with the Cobden Club, a British free trade organization, American protectionists were highly suspicious of any British influence on American trade policy and warned constantly of a British "Conspiracy of Free Trade" that supposedly threatened to attack the American protective tariff system and thus, in the protectionist mind, American wages and national prosperity.[36]

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During the Great Tariff Debate of 1888, for example, the APTL aggressively attempted to portray Grover Cleveland and the Democrats as mere mouthpieces of British free trade interests and willing servants of the Cobden Club. The League framed the election as a quintessential choice between British free trade and American protectionism. Shortly before the election, the APTL printed its own seal next to the Cobden Club's under the headline, "Under Which Emblem?" (Fig. 3) The league commented: "The Citizens of the United States on November 6th will decide for a generation, between Free Foreign Trade which has cursed every nation ever blessed (?) with it, and Protection with its benedictions to all nations. Here are the battle shields of the two parties. The British Cobden Club seal with its 'Free-Trade,' and the American Protective Tariff League seal with its emblems of Protection to home industries. Will you choose the Cobden Club with its Free Trade strap and buckle, to bind you in perpetual poverty, or the Protection emblem with its plow, anchor, loom, and anvil—emblems of agriculture, manufacture and commerce—the emblems of a nation's strength."[37]

Another telling example of the APTL's use of Anglophobic stereotypes can be observed in its leaflet, *Why Irishmen should be Protectionists*. It merged conspiratorial protectionist Anglophobia with the extant Anglophobic prejudices of working-class Irish Americans. Painting a grim picture of Irish history, in which English free trade ideas and their execution upon Ireland were the root cause of the country's economic and political misery, the pamphlet attempted to project Irish resentments against Britain onto the American tariff debate: "[The Irish] have not only their impoverished country as a warning against the evils of Free-Trade, but they have American industry and American prosperity as examples of the benefits of Protection. Once they have been driven from

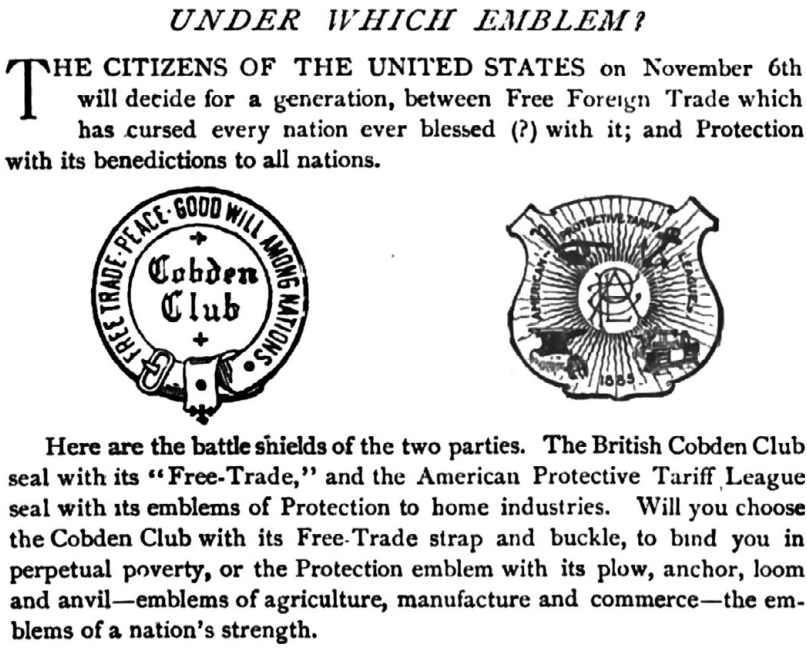

Figure 3. "Under Which Emblem?" published by the APTL during the Great Tariff Debate of 1888, framed the election as a choice between British free trade and American protectionism. *Tariff League Bulletin*, October 12, 1888.

their homes by Free-Trade. They will hardly want to suffer a second experience."[38] The targets of this kind of xenophobic attacks were, however, not set in stone but rather adapted over time. For example, a 1919 pamphlet on the subject of "Oriental Competition" portrayed the low standard of Japanese wages ("starvation wages from the American standard") as the great danger to American workers. "Look out for the Japanese menace!" the pamphlet warned.[39]

But beyond the wage argument and xenophobic attacks, the APTL also addressed the general relationship between capital and labor. Regularly, the organization explicitly connected workers' interest in protectionism, namely higher wages, to capitalists' interest in it, namely protection from foreign competition in the American market. The League openly promoted cooperation between labor and capital as its ultimate goal. Capital's concurring interest in protective tariffs was thus not hidden but explicitly highlighted in the argument presented to workers. Press coverage of the APTL's founding had already noted this theme of uniting the common protectionist interest of capital and labor under the organization's umbrella. "The Protective League will by its publications try to prove that the protection which they have and insist upon is equally beneficial to the workingmen and the capitalists."[40] This peculiar union of interests remained a constant feature in the APTL's agitation. Each issue of the *American Economist* proudly boasted the motto, "Devoted To The Protection Of American Labor And Industries," in its nameplate.[41] The idea was even explicitly written into the APTL's principles:

> [T]he American Protective Tariff League proposes a union and organization of all industrial workers of America in defense and for the elevation of the American standard of wages, living and self-government.… In furtherance of this purpose, it appeals to all who share in the trials and achievements of American industry, whether wage-earners or wage-payers, to combine in support of a movement which, with their aid, will not only insure the triumph of the American system in America, and improve the condition of all our people, but, by its influence and example, advance the conditions of industrial life throughout the world.[42]

The idea of national unity between capital and labor was also evoked by the League's general secretary Robert P. Porter when he internally described the organization's purpose in 1887:

> It is not partisan, it is not an industrial organization, it is not a labor organization. It aims to unite all other organizations in the patriotic work. Its platform proposes to protect all American labor, whether agricultural, manufacturing, mining or commercial, against the competition of low-priced labor in foreign countries.… To accomplish this we urge the union of all industrial workers of America in defence and for the elevation of the American standard of wages, living and self-government.[43]

It was thus not only different branches of industry that the APTL wanted to unite under the banner of protectionism; the League also aimed at uniting the otherwise so strongly diverging interests of industry and agriculture and, within industry, of capital and labor. This encompassing national union of interests that the APTL proposed was ultimately imagined as a defensive cooperation. As Porter further explained, it was the upsurge of

free trade agitation in the 1880s that supposedly threatened the protectionist hold on national politics, and necessitated a solidified response:

> In the past Protectionists have been divided, in the pursuit and defence of special local interests, while on the other hand the Free-trade hosts mustered in a solid phalanx, have been attacking with untiring energy the strongest citadel of the protective policy.… The necessity of more active and more extended work is therefore apparent. A solid front must be presented by Protectionists to the determined and united army of Free-traders, ready to attack the American system with all their force, wherever it appears that a majority of the people are in favor of Protection.[44]

In essence, the APTL proclaimed that the tariff issue superseded all potential conflicts between workers of different industries, all conflicts between industry and agriculture, and, most importantly, all conflicts between capital and labor. Furthermore, at times the APTL suggested that, between the latter two, *no* conflict of interest existed. Rather, capital and labor were, in the APTL's imagination, dependent upon each other in the creation of national prosperity. A typical presentation of that idea can be found in the *American Economist* in 1898: "True friendship for the toilers is not in setting labor against capital and capital against labor, but in harmonizing their interests, which are identical. That party is the true friend of labor which spends its time, not in abusing capital, but in making possible for capital to sell its products so that labor may have employment in producing more."[45]

The APTL drew the central conflict line of political economy not between capital and labor but between the American economy and other national economies. Protective tariffs as import barriers to foreign products were the real-world manifestation of this conflict line and simultaneously, as the APTL argued, the solution. With protective walls erected on the outside, the stage was set for the harmonious advancement of the American economy on the inside—to the common benefit of all. This idealized conceptualization of the American economy simply ignored the constant harsh and often violent clashes between workers and their employers that so characteristically shaped industrial relations during the Gilded Age. The APTL even claimed to address "all workers, whether employers or employed," suggesting that a meaningful difference between the two groups did not exist.[46] (Fig. 4)

Like the wage argument, the theme of a protectionist union of interests between capital and labor and its nationalist implications were hardly new in protectionist thinking. Rather, this reasoning traced back to the antebellum period and the works of Henry Carey, who first developed the idea of a "Harmony of Interests." To Carey, labor and capital were not adversaries, but rather necessary, equal, and harmonious components in the construction of a prosperous national economy, which, most of all, needed to be protected from aggressive outside competition through high import tariffs.[47] However, the prominence of the theme in the APTL's agitation is remarkable given the political context of Gilded Age labor upheaval and the fact that the APTL remained, in essence, an association of wealthy industrialists. Seen in this light, the APTL's labor agitation can also be interpreted as an attempt by industrialists to calm the raging labor conflicts of the period and to instigate a less conflictual relationship with workers. The soothing tone with regard to capital's relation to labor, and the disseminated image of capitalists as harmonious benefactors of workers, are clear indications of this attempt. The APTL even occasionally alluded to the labor conflicts of the era but, unsurprisingly, supported

Figure 4. "Good News for Americans," cartoon printed by the APTL in celebration of the passing of the protectionist Dingley Tariff. It illustrates the protectionist idea of a national "Harmony of Interests" between capital and labor. *American Economist*, July 23, 1897.

capital's side of the bargain: "The danger now is that, under the pressure of popular prejudice against capitalists and employers, the process of hampering great industrial enterprises by measures looking exclusively to the benefit of wage receivers may be carried so far as to drive capital out of business, and thus kill the goose that lays golden eggs for millions of people."[48]

Also, like many other protectionists, the APTL's endorsement of protective tariffs turned directly against unions and labor organizations.[49] Unions, the League argued, were not a proper means to secure American workers' wages and to guarantee their jobs. "Trade and labor unions are powerless against the demoralizing effects of Free Foreign Trade," declared the APTL, pointing to the harsh living conditions and low wages of British workers despite the supposed omnipresence of unions in Britain.[50] In line with their focus on the competition between the American economy and other national economies as the major economic conflict, it was not unions and self-organization, but rather tariffs and cooperation with capitalists, which the APTL advised in order to advance the wages and living conditions of American workers.

On closer examination, a great deal of ambivalence toward labor's non-tariff-related demands can be detected in the APTL's use of nativist tropes. As demonstrated above, the APTL attempted to capitalize on the strong nativist sentiments prevalent among workers. It also addressed labor's strident resistance to immigration. While the APTL, being essentially a single-issue public pressure group, did not endorse anti-immigration legislation, it repeatedly pointed out that workers' opposition to low-wage immigrant labor had a logical counterpart in the support of high import tariffs. Foreign goods entering the

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country without charge were equated with immigrant workers willing to work for lower wages. For example, an 1888 pamphlet against the Democratic Mills Bill made this point quite drastically: "Brothers! … Fight [the Mills Bill] without delay, and fight it to its death; and then make your Tariff so Protective as to shut out cheap foreign labor in the form of manufactured goods."[51] More sober versions of the argument could be found in the *American Economist*:

> There is no difference between bringing over foreign workmen by contract to work in this country at their home wages and contracting to bring over and import free into this country the goods produced at their homes by those workmen at their pauper wages; except that in the former case the little pittance which those workmen earned would be spent in this country while in the latter case—i.e. under Free-Trade—it would be spent in their own countries.[52]

The publication went on to state: "So far as immigration is related to labor, every argument in favor of any restriction to it … holds just as strongly and even more strongly against Free-Trade. American laboring men would do well to give attention to this fact."[53]

The case of immigration policy, however, was a slippery slope for the APTL. Clearly, the case of immigration restriction served as an anchor to further attach protectionist ideas to wider labor sentiments. The instrumental nature of this approach was especially evident given the difference of interest capitalists and laborers held regarding the immigration of low-wage workers. Whereas employers benefited heavily from possibly reducing the wage-share of their production costs, laborers resisted immigration, fearing a drastic reduction of wages through the resulting overabundance of labor.[54] Immigration's usefulness as an issue of protectionist agitation thus held a certain ambivalence. While it presented an opportunity to tie protectionism to labor nativism, it also unearthed existing conflicts of interests between capital and labor and, thus, ran counter to the APTL's idealized vision of a national union of interests under the banner of protectionism and, consequently, only featured marginally in the APTL's agitation. (Fig. 5)

"We have avoided most scrupulously and carefully that controversial field": The Labor Movement's Contested Neutrality on the Tariff Issue

The ambivalences of the APTL's labor agitation, especially its opposition to labor unions and its stance on immigration, should prompt scholars to question how genuine the APTL's concern for workers' fate in the tariff question was. Obviously, a group of industrialists, demanding tariff protection highly beneficial to their enterprises and spending large amounts of money to court laborers, raises suspicion. It is extremely difficult to determine to which extent the labor agitation of the APTL was more than a cynical maneuver designed to form a popular support base for the execution of industrialists' economic interests. Some elements of the APTL's agitation, like its ambivalent stance on the immigration question and its opposition to unions, certainly suggest a high level of tactical motivation. In the same vein, the very fact that the drastic labor struggles of the Gilded Age had unfolded at a time when large parts of the American industrial economy had already experienced high tariff protection rendered the idea that high tariffs could represent a cure to this very problem an illusion grounded, quite obviously, in strategical considerations rather than ideological convictions. Yet this fact does not rule out in principle the possibility that the protectionist convictions of industrialists and their promulgation of the wage argument were sincere. However obvious the tactical aspects in the APTL's labor agitation and the economic interest behind it appear, the conclusion

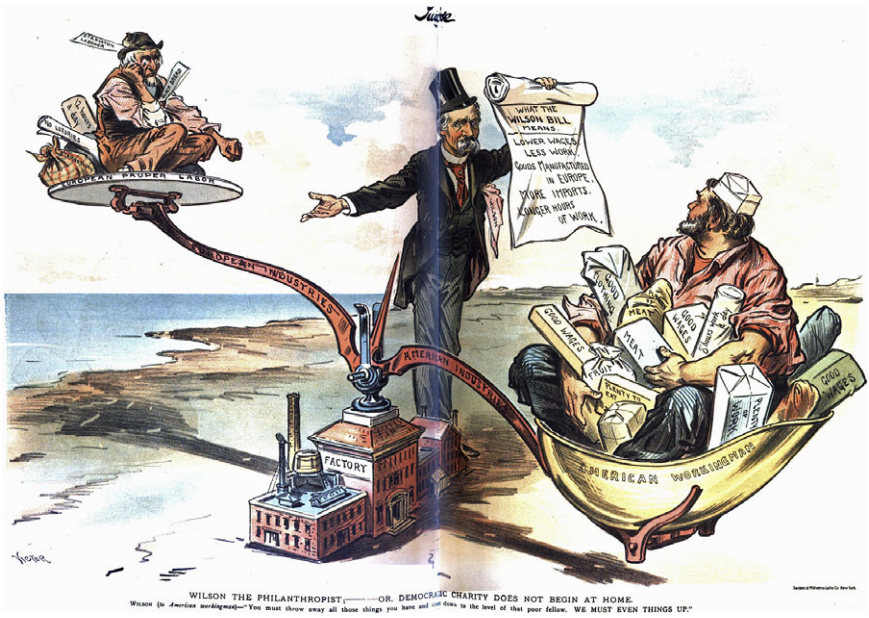
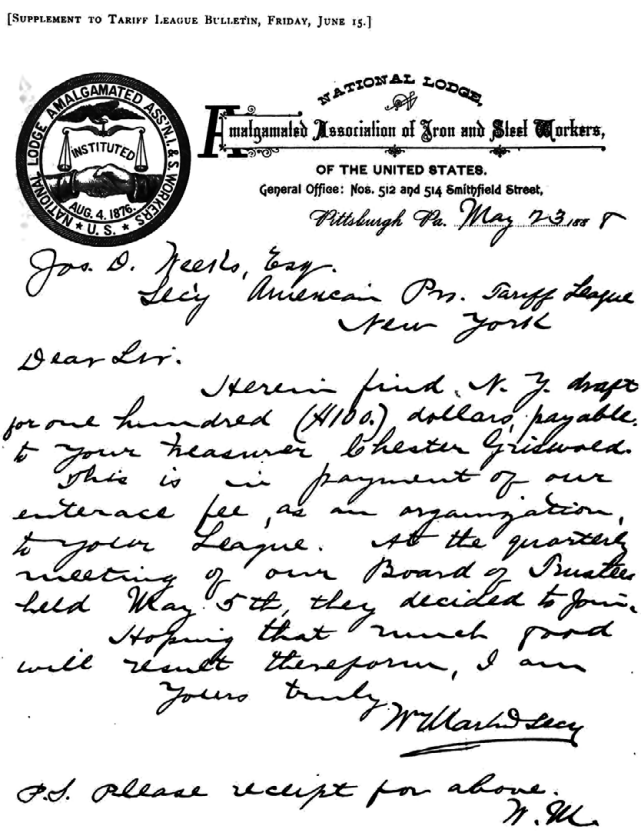


Figure 5. "Wilson the Philanthropist," cartoon from *Judge* magazine illustrating the protectionist wage argument by showing American workers' wage competition with "European Pauper Labor." *Judge*, January 20, 1894.

that, therefore, the League's arguments and ideas must have been insincere or appeared illogical to contemporaries is not justified.[55] Ultimately, the question of ideological sincerity is of secondary importance. It is, thus, perhaps more fruitful to examine the effects of protectionist labor agitation by turning to contemporary reactions from laborers.

How did laborers react to the APTL's courting and protectionist agitation in general? To what degree were they willing to support a union of interest proposed by wealthy industrialists in furtherance of the supposed common benefits from tariff protectionism? As noted above, the APTL was an elite organization. Despite its loud call to unite capitalists and workers under the banner of protection, there were almost no labor representatives among the organization's ranks, a fact that was suspiciously absent from the APTL's publications. In fact, as far as it can be grasped from membership lists, only the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (the nation's largest union) and its former president, John Jarrett, were members of the League. The APTL was so proud of this fact that it printed a full-page facsimile of the Association's accession letter in its bulletin. (Fig. 6)[56] The Iron and Steel Workers were notorious for their protectionist convictions. Jarrett was at the time described as a "protectionist of the extremest school" and was an active tariff lobbyist as the secretary of the American Tinned Plate Association.[57] Beyond these examples, not much evidence exists for the active participation of labor representatives in the League's activities. At the APTL's inaugural meeting in 1885, there was one labor delegate, from the Knights of Labor, in attendance. But even this representative remained, perhaps symptomatically, skeptical regarding labor's potential benefits from participating in the organization. He hoped the League would "be not so much to protect American Industry as to protect American citizens. It should prevent them from coming in competition with Europeans who had been accustomed to living on less money and consequently could work for less, and it should also guard them against pauper labor." The representative also feared the APTL's financing through subscriptions

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781424000616



[Supplement to Tariff League Bulletin, Friday, June 15.]

NATIONAL LODGE,
Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers,
OF THE UNITED STATES.
General Office: Nos. 512 and 514 Smithfield Street,
Pittsburgh Pa. May 23 1888

Jos. D. Weeks, Esq.
Sec'y American Pro. Tariff League
New York

Dear Sir.

Herein find N. Y. draft for one hundred ($100.) dollars, payable to your treasurer Chester Griswold. This is in payment of our entrance fee, as an organization, to your League. At the quarterly meeting of our Board of Trustees held May 5th, they decided to join. Hoping that much good will result therefrom, I am

Yours truly
Wm Martin Secy

P.S. Please receipt for above.
W. M.

Figure 6. Facsimile of the accession letter of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers to the APTL as it was printed by the League. *Tariff League Bulletin, Supplement*, June 15, 1888.

and donations would "drive the association into the hands of a few men who contributed."[58]

However, the fact that this representative's remarks also mirrored the APTL's wage argument suggests that a shared insistence on the importance of protective tariffs as safeguards against low foreign wages existed, at least among some industrial laborers. Yet it is very difficult to ascertain workers' political thinking and feelings on the tariff issue. Since the available sources hardly convey authentic workers' sentiments on the tariff issue, most tariff histories are concerned with elites, especially politicians, industrialists, businessmen, intellectuals, and journalists. Certainly, due to diverging regional and branch interests, not all workers were affected equally by protective tariffs. Widely diverging tariff rates on various products, and also the (in part) drastic changes of these specific tariff rates over time meant that some laborers worked in highly protected industries, whereas others toiled in industries without any tariff protection. Nevertheless, the working population at large, understood mainly as consumers, constituted, in many ways, the logical target group not for protectionists but for tariff reformers and free traders. Protectionism, they argued, made workers' lives more expensive as consumers had to pay the excise costs

created by the tariff.[59] Tariff protectionism, then, had an appeal only for a certain segment of the labor force: laborers working in protected industries. To them, protectionism meant maintaining and fostering an industry, and thus employment, that might not survive without protection. In addition, workers in protected industries were promised—at least nominally—higher wages than would have been possible without protection.[60] The Republican Party's electoral success in the industrial Northeast might be an indication of protectionist sentiment among local workers; after all, it was they who cast the millions of ballots for protectionist politicians, not their bosses.[61]

As with other political issues of the era, looking at the organized labor movement and its relationship to the tariff issue might give a more nuanced indication of workers' political stance on the matter. While the organized labor movement nominally only represented roughly 10 percent of American workers, its leaders still expressed the aspirations, fears, and political demands of wider segments of the working population and conveyed them to the broader public.[62] Throughout the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the organized labor movement, in all its shades, showed great interest in the tariff issue, even though opinions varied widely. Many individual unions, like seamen, mine workers, musicians, locomotive engineers, firemen, and enginemen, for example, were notorious for their opposition to high tariffs.[63] Other unions, especially the influential iron and steel workers, were fiercely protectionist. At times, this protectionist sentiment also bridged individual unions' organizational capacity and created powerful demonstrations of labor protectionism. In 1894, for example, union workers, mostly from the Northeast, formed the Workingmen's Protective Tariff League to protest the Democratic Wilson-Gorman Tariff; several thousand of them even marched on the streets of Washington when the Senate debated the bill.[64] Even more prominently, in November 1928, the strong protectionist sentiment among some unions resulted in the creation of a national organization, America's Wage Earners Protective Conference (WEPC), led by Matthew Woll, president of the International Photo-Engravers Union. The WEPC encompassed seventeen different unions, representing roughly 250,000 workers, and became a powerful political force in the late 1920s and early 1930s.[65] Nevertheless, these protectionist sentiments never represented more than a vociferous minority among American workers and also never bridged the regional divide. Industrial protectionist groups like the APTL were not directly involved in this kind of labor protectionism but did express strong support in their print outlets.[66]

Given the widely diverging interests within the labor movement, the American Federation of Labor and the Knights of Labor, the two most important national labor organizations of the era, were forced to assume a position of strict neutrality on the tariff. This neutrality should, however, not be confused with disinterest or a lack of engagement. On the contrary, precisely because the tariff was such a hotly debated topic and opposing opinions on it were so entrenched among labor representatives, stalling the issue altogether was the only way to stop it from splitting the labor movement. A certain difficulty in agreeing on common demands was a constant problem for the national American labor movement, given the heterogeneous composition of the workforce.[67] But the tariff's divisive potential was still outstanding. Whatever their precise position on the tariff might have been, workers were not a disinterested passive mass, impressionable and susceptible to simple propaganda tricks. They were actively engaged and strongly committed to the tariff debate. The case of the AFL is a good illustration of this contested neutrality.[68] An umbrella organization of, at its peak, over 100 individual unions from a varied spectrum of industry branches, the AFL struggled to find a common position on the tariff. The widely diverging opinions among its member unions dictated that the AFL

effectively banished tariff discussions from its annual conventions between 1882 and the 1940s.[69]

The reality of how divisive and controversial the tariff could be among workers had already become obvious during the AFL's early years. When the first convention of the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions, the precursor to the AFL, met in Pittsburgh in November 1881, the delegates were already split between protectionists, free traders, and neutralists.[70] Nevertheless, John Jarrett, chairman of the convention, pushed a protectionist tariff plank into the Federation's political platform. The issue, though, was highly controversial; a motion to remove the tariff proposal from the agenda was only narrowly defeated by a vote of 38 to 35. One delegate aptly described the tense atmosphere: "If there is any rock on which this congress of Trade Unions will split, it is the tariff plank."[71] Cassandra-like, this prophecy proved to be true only a year later, when the 1882 convention removed the protectionist plank from the platform and adopted a strictly neutral stand, causing the infuriated Jarrett and his fellow iron and steel workers to march out of the convention and leave the Federation.[72] As a result of these controversies, the neutrality policy remained intact from 1882 onward, despite the tariff's prominence as a national political issue. Writing in 1906, AFL president Samuel Gompers referred to the tumultuous conventions of 1881 and 1882 when lauding the neutrality policy: "[T]he Federation eliminated from its declarations any expression in favor of either protection or free trade. Since then the American Federation of Labor, as such, has never been called upon to either discuss or express itself upon either policy, and we have found this to be the most advantageous to the movement in this country."[73] As late as 1929, AFL president William Green could proudly look back on the organization's stand on the tariff issue and proclaim, "The American Federation of Labor has never committed itself to the support of a protective tariff or free trade. We have avoided most scrupulously and carefully that controversial field."[74]

The AFL's conventions seldomly addressed the tariff issue. And in these rare instances, it proved its potential to cause considerable uproar. In 1906, for example, the convention rejected two proposals for specific tariff eliminations, whereas it approved a proposal to demand higher tariffs on other specific goods. This breach of the neutrality policy caused tremendous upheaval. The pursuing vote to repeal this decision—and thus stay faithful to the traditional neutrality position—was only narrowly defeated (75 to 79 votes). As a result, the subsequent 1907 convention forwarded all tariff proposals directly to the resolution committee and thus withdrew them from general discussion because the tariff proposals of the previous debate had "caused about as much commotion as anything in the convention," according to AFL vice president James Duncan. The proceeding records drily noted, "The committee referred the resolution to the Executive Council so they could act in concert along the lines desired … without giving a chance to open the flood gates in this convention to the tariff question."[75]

The AFL's contested policy of neutrality, which arose from the strongly opposing views of different unions within this national umbrella organization, was somewhat mirrored by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). This association was formed in 1895 as a national federation to voice the political demands of manufacturers, especially their hostility to the advances of labor legislation, and usually acted as the AFL's quintessential antagonist. Yet the NAM also struggled to find a position on the tariff issue acceptable to its diverse membership. Whereas many manufacturers associated with the NAM traditionally leaned toward the Republican Party and demanded tariff protection for their industry, other manufacturers had outgrown the American market and sought lower tariffs to gain easier access to foreign markets. In fact, this intensified search for

overseas markets was another key issue leading to the creation of the NAM in the first place. As a result of the diverse composition of its membership, the NAM took a somewhat illogical position. It supported the maintenance of the protective tariff system but also called for a policy of trade reciprocity, which entailed offering lower tariff rates for specific products in order to open up foreign markets by negotiating trade treaties with foreign nations. Reciprocity became a major point of conflict within the Republican camp in the early twentieth century and was bitterly opposed by the APTL and other orthodox protectionist groups.[76] The fact that the AFL and the NAM, the national representative organizations of labor and industry, respectively, experienced similar difficulties in formulating a coherent tariff policy illustrates the enormous divisive potential of the tariff issue but also points to the decisive role of regional and industry-branch-related differences that seem to have superseded other factors in determining trade policy preferences.

If the AFL and the history of its contested neutrality are any indication, workers hotly debated the tariff issue. Opinions were polarized and, importantly, deeply entrenched. Combined with strong regional and branch differences, it seems that mainly self-interest drove workers' positioning on the tariff issue. Protection from low-wage competition and secured employment were obviously attractive to industrial workers from protected industries. Presumably out of self-interest, they were acutely aware of the advantage protective tariffs granted to them and were willing to defend that advantage. Whether or not elite protectionist agitation like the APTL's played a role in solidifying this position is difficult to determine. Conversely, though, the stiff resistance that labor protectionists met from other representatives indicates that free trade convictions were strongly entrenched in other segments of the labor force, as well. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely that elite protectionist agitation had much success in converting workers who had not already shared a conviction for protectionism.

Indeed, industrialists' calls to unity under the banner of protectionism even had the adverse effect of rigidifying labor skepticism precisely because industrialists were so strongly and openly engaged in the matter. While the tariff issue was absent from the party's election platforms of the era, Eugene V. Debs, himself a former railroad union officer and successive presidential candidate of the Socialist Party of America, aggressively argued for labor neutrality in the tariff debate. According to Debs:

> So long as the present system of capitalism prevails and the few are allowed to own the nation's industries, the toiling masses will be struggling in the hell of poverty as they are today. To tell them that juggling with the tariff will change this beastly and disgraceful condition is to insult their intelligence.… The exploited wage-slaves of free trade England and of the highly protected United States are the victims of the same capitalism; in England the politicians tell them they are suffering because they have no protective tariff and in the United States they tell them that the tariff is the cause of their poverty.[77]

If the APTL and other protectionist industrialists drew the main conflict of the industrial economy between different national economies, Debs and other labor leaders contended that the conflict of interest between capital and labor was of overriding importance. In this socialist perspective, the tariff was, simply put, not a relevant issue for workers; rather, industrialists' sudden interest in the fate of workers was primarily a cause for alarm. Given the primacy of the capital-labor conflict, the tariff debate, understood as a debate mostly

among capitalists, held little promise for workers and could, in fact, be perceived at best as a noisy distraction from the real issues.[78]

Taking a similar stand, Terence V. Powderly, Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, in 1890 directly rejected any type of labor courting typical for industrial organizations like the APTL: "'Protection to American labor' is the watchword on which the American manufacturer enters the halls of Congress to ask for an increase of tariff on the articles manufactured in his workshops, and by his employees; but 'every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost,' is the motto which would be emblazoned on his shield if he wrote the truth upon it."[79] Displaying the nativist undertones typical of the American labor movement of the late nineteenth century, Powderly assumed the position of a worker who asked,

> [W]hy is it that my employer so assiduously demands that a protective tariff be imposed on these articles under pretense of protecting the American workmen from foreign competition; why is it that he presents to me the petition to sign against the reduction of the tariff, telling me, as he does it, that it is to my interest to sign it, so that foreign cheap labor will not kill our industries, and at the same time be engaged in making terms with the foreign agent for the shipment of alien workmen to enter into competition with me and my fellow-laborers?[80]

Conclusion

In summary, the labor argument proposed by the APTL can be described as twofold. First, the APTL focused heavily on the wage argument and maintained that protective tariffs shielded American workers against low-wage competition, usually from Europe. Tariffs, in that view, were a necessary safeguard guaranteeing high wages and a decent standard of living. To this end, the APTL attempted to channel labor's nativist sentiments into an argument for high tariffs and against foreign, especially British, labor. What is more, the APTL proposed that labor, in pursuit of protected high wages, should cooperate with industrialists. Essentially, the APTL straightforwardly suggested that a union of interest existed between labor and capital on the tariff issue, which dictated a common national effort across class boundaries to further American prosperity. In this way of thinking, protectionists offered the tariff as a cure for Gilded Age social tensions and labor conflicts, as well as an antidote for unions, which, given the supposed harmony of interests between capital and labor, would eventually become obsolete if only the tariff was recognized as the main line of economic controversy and be kept sufficiently high. Also, the APTL's agitation mixed typical protectionist Anglophobia with late nineteenth-century, anti-immigrant stereotypes in an attempt to appeal to industrial workers' nativist sentiment.

As far as the evidence shows, American workers only rarely reciprocated this kind of elite protectionist effort to form a national alliance between capital and labor under the banner of tariff protectionism. The wage argument and protectionist policies saw sizable support from a specific segment of the labor force, mainly industrial workers from protected industries. It is, however, doubtful whether this support can be interpreted as the effect of protectionists' agitation efforts. Rather, it seems to have been mainly the result of labor protectionists economic self-interest. Other segments of the working population rejected protectionism in equally strong terms. They, too, were certainly not susceptible to protectionist agitation. If anything, elite protectionist agitation might have had a reverse effect as it raised suspicion among labor representatives who, for the most part, rejected the idea of a union of interests and harmonious cooperation with capitalists. The national union of interests, a harmonious cooperation between industrialists and laborers, did not materialize. It remained what the context of Gilded Age labor

struggles had always suggested it was: perhaps a useful agitation tool but, ultimately, an idealized fiction.

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Notes

1 Grover Cleveland, "December 6, 1887: Third Annual Message," https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-6-1887-third-annual-message (accessed Dec. 1, 2023).

2 See Donald C. Johnson, *The Wealth of a Nation: A History of Trade Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 109–114.

3 Joanne R. Reitano, *The Tariff Question in the Gilded Age: The Great Debate of 1888* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994), xxi–xxii, 66–68.

4 Cleveland, "Third Annual Message." See also James L. Huston, "A Political Response to Industrialism: The Republican Embrace of Protectionist Labor Doctrines," *Journal of American History* 70 (June 1983): 35–57.

5 Eric Arnesen, "American Workers and the Labor Movement in the Late Nineteenth Century" in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 53–74.

6 See, for example, the wage argument's treatment in newer synthesis works of the field: Douglas A. Irwin, *Clashing over Commerce: A History of U.S. Trade Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 242; Alfred E. Eckes Jr., *Opening America's Market: U.S. Foreign Trade Policy since 1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 29–34.

7 Despite the APTL's status as the largest, longest existing, and most influential tariff pressure group, previous scholarship has only scarcely addressed its history. The only specific treatment is a descriptive journal article from 1930. Beyond that, the APTL features in numerous studies on the tariff issue but is only mentioned in passing and never analyzed in depth. Most extensive, but still far from exhaustive, are Reitano and Wiebe, who connect the APTL to other important pressure groups, recognizing the whole spectrum of organized protectionist pressure groups. Wilford J. Eiteman, "The Rise and Decline of Orthodox Tariff Propaganda," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 45 (Nov. 1930): 22–39; Reitano, *Tariff Question in the Gilded Age*, 115–116; Robert H. Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1968), 20, 56.

8 *American Economist*, May 24, 1895, 249; American Protective Tariff League, *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws, List of Officers, Defenders and Official Correspondents, with Letters of Approval from Prominent Friends of Protection* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1894); *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws, List of Officers, Defenders and Official Correspondents, with Letters of Approval from Prominent Friends of Protection* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1892); *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws, List of Officers, Defenders and Members, with Presidential Annual Address, List of Documents, etc.* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1889).

9 For example, the turn-of-the-century leadership of the APTL included representatives from the textile, pottery, optical instruments, iron, steel, aluminum, glass, and pencil industries.

10 In the 1890s, many U.S. senators, members of the House of Representatives, cabinet members, and several state governors, all of them Republicans, were members of the League. So was President William McKinley, whose Secretary of the Interior, Cornelius N. Bliss, was simultaneously president of the APTL.

11 This identity set the APTL apart from other influential protectionist groups like the National Association of Woolgrowers or the American Iron and Steel Association, which were tied to specific industries. Among other protectionist organizations, none had the national organization and political reach that the APTL commanded at its height. Reitano, *Tariff Question in the Gilded Age*, 115–116.

12 This dependence on individual donors was also lamented in an internal report by President Edward H. Ammidown in 1887; American Protective Tariff League, *Reports of the President and General Secretary* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1887), 9–10.

13 As mentioned above, national membership stood at 955 individuals in 1895.

14 Organizations like the Boston-based Home Market Club and the American Iron and Steel Association in Philadelphia were similar in their elite backing and in their attempt to create a popular appeal for protectionist policies but not in the scope of interests that they represented; the Home Market Club was dominated by New England textile manufacturers while the American Iron and Steel Association exclusively represented iron and steel interests, mostly from Pennsylvania. However, the pattern of argumentation centered around the wage argument is very similar to the APTL's approach. See, for example, Home Market Club, *Labor Abroad: Speech of Hon. William P. Frye of Maine before the Home Market Club, Boston, October 19, 1887* (Boston, MA: Home Market Club, 1894); American Iron and Steel Association, *Who Are Benefited by Protection? An Editorial Article in the Bulletin of the American Iron and Steel Association* (Philadelphia, PA: American Iron and Steel Association, 1880).

15 Richard F. Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8–11, 457–468.

16 Bensel, *Political Economy of American Industrialization*, 488–492. In his analysis of the tariff as a "force for social organization and identity" for industrial workers, especially from the iron and steel industry, Bensel quotes from the *American Economist*, demonstrating the key function the APTL fulfilled as a tool for creating and sustaining popular support for industrial elite interests (p. 492).

17 American Protective Tariff League, *Wage Earners under Protection and Free-Trade* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1890).

18 American Protective Tariff League, *What is a Tariff? Whom Does it Benefit? Who Pays the Duties? Answers to a Workingman's Question* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1890).

19 The APTL invested significant work in developing specific pamphlets targeting different audiences. In the case of labor agitation, the League also attempted to have its pamphlets distributed by industrialists among their workers. American Protective Tariff League, *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1892), 32–33.

20 American Protective Tariff League, *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws* (1889), 6.

21 American Protective Tariff League, *Principles, Constitution, and By-Laws* (1889), 3.

22 Edwin A. Hartshorn, *Wages, Living, and Tariff* (Troy, NY: William H. Young, 1884), 9 (republished by the APTL in 1888).

23 The argument's obvious limitation that, in fact, not mere wage figures but wages in relation to productivity would represent a more suitable basis for comparison, was usually omitted in such agitation. Instead, high wages in production were, often implicitly, associated directly with high prices of the eventual end product and vice versa. This association was not just true for the APTL's argument but also the protectionist wage argument more generally. See Robert D. Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," *Southern Economic Journal* 28 (July 1961): 63–64; Frank W. Taussig: *Tariff History of the United States* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923), 365–367.

24 American Protective Tariff League, *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws* (1889), 6–7.

25 American Protective Tariff League, *English and American Wages and Pauperism* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1890), 4.

26 American Protective Tariff League, *Workingmen and the Tariff* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, [c. 1889]), 2–8.

27 American Protective Tariff League, *Workingmen and the Tariff*, 10.

28 Huston, "Political Response to Industrialism," 42–43, 56.

29 Hartshorn, *Wages, Living, and Tariff*, 32–33.

30 Huston, "Political Response to Industrialism," 36–37; Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," 62–63; Daniel J. B. Mitchell, "Labor and the Tariff Question," *Industrial Relations* 9 (May 1970): 268–276; Taussig, *Tariff History of the United States*, 65–67.

31 Irwin, *Clashing over Commerce*, 242.

32 The American Presidency Project, Republican Party Platforms, https://presidency.ucsb.edu/people/other/republican-party-platforms, (accessed Dec. 1, 2023).

33 American Iron and Steel Association, *Who Are Benefited by Protection*, 1.

34 Reitano, *Tariff Question in the Gilded Age*, 78–79.

35 Stephen Tuffnell, "'Uncle Sam is to be Sacrificed': Anglophobia in Late Nineteenth-Century Politics and Culture," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12 (Apr. 2011): 77–99.
36 Marc-William Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade. The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalization: 1846–1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 59–67.
37 *Tariff League Bulletin* (New York), Oct. 12, 1888, 166. The League also published lists of the Cobden Club's American members; *Tariff League Bulletin* (New York), Apr. 20, 1888, 142. For an extended version of the League's argument against the Cobden Club, see Jacob Harris Patton, *Our Tariff: Why Levied and Why Continued and the Cobden Club* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1887), 72–87.
38 American Protective Tariff League, *Why Irishmen Should be Protectionists* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1890), 3.
39 American Protective Tariff League, *American Wages Will Be Slaughtered by Oriental Competition Unless Protectionists in and out of Congress Unite to Put up the Protection Bars. Japanese Wages Are Starvation Wages from the American Standard. American Wages Are More than Eight Times the Average Wages in Japan* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1919). In many ways, these xenophobic anxieties foreshadowed the import restriction debates of the post-World War II era, when Japanese products began flooding the American market, causing enormous resistance from workers of import-sensitive industries. James C. Benton, *Fraying Fabric: How Trade Policy and Industrial Decline Transformed America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022), 43–46, 72–79, 95–100.
40 "Perfecting its Organization: The American Protective Tariff League Stirred into Activity," *New York Times*, May 19, 1886.
41 The motto remained on the nameplate of the magazine for decades. It was only removed in 1927 when the *American Economist* was replaced by its successor magazine *Tariff Review*, which was also published in New York City. *American Economist*, Oct. 1887, 25; *American Economist*, July 2, 1926, 209; *Tariff Review*, Jan. 1927.
42 American Protective Tariff League, *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws* (1889), 7.
43 American Protective Tariff League, *Reports of the President and General Secretary*, 11.
44 American Protective Tariff League, *Reports of the President and General Secretary*, 10.
45 *American Economist*, June 3, 1898, 255.
46 American Protective Tariff League, *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws* (New York: American Protective Tariff League, 1889), 7.
47 Reitano, *Tariff Question in the Gilded Age*, 81–82.
48 *American Economist*, May 12, 1893, 180. It is probably no coincidence that such commentary was buried in the long opinion pieces of the *American Economist* and did not feature in the leaflets directed at workers.
49 Huston, "Political Response to Industrialism," 54–55.
50 Hartshorn, *Wages, Living, and Tariff*, 28–29.
51 American Protective Tariff League, *Wage Earners under Protection and Free-Trade*, 4.
52 *American Economist*, Feb. 5, 1897, 70.
53 *American Economist*, Feb. 26, 1897, 107.
54 Huston, "Political Response to Industrialism," 46–47.
55 Huston, "Political Response to Industrialism," 45.
56 Both the Association and Jarrett himself were listed as "Defenders." American Protective Tariff League, *Principles, Constitution and By-Laws* (New York; American Protective Tariff League, 1894), 39, 41. The APTL proudly boasted about the iron and steel workers' support for the League and interpreted it as proof of its claim that capital and labor's interest in protectionist tariffs were essentially the same. *Tariff League Bulletin* (New York), June 1, 1888, 188; supplement to *Tariff League Bulletin* (New York), June 15, 1888.
57 Judson Maclaury, "The Selection of the First U.S. Commissioner of Labor," *Monthly Labor Review* 98 (Apr. 1975): 16–19.
58 "Their Title Pre-Empted: A Protective Tariff Association obliged to Change its Name," *New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1885.
59 Ajay K. Mehrotra, "'More Mighty than the Waves of the Sea': Toilers, Tariffs, and the Income Tax Movement, 1880–1913," *Labor History* 45 (June 2004): 165–198.
60 This idea, however, hinged on bosses' willingness to transmit the widened margin of profit to their workers in the form of higher wages. There is some evidence to suggest that this process happened quite regularly on the basis of so-called profit-sharing clauses. Yet it is not possible to make general claims about the

impact of tariff protection on the wages paid in specific industries. Bensel, *Political Economy of American Industrialization*, 490–491.

61 For example, in his analysis of the coalition supporting the highly protectionist McKinley Tariff in 1890, Richard Bensel showed that congressional districts dominated by the wool manufacturing and iron and steel industries, both heavily protected, tended to vote for Republican candidates and that congressmen from these districts voted for the McKinley Tariff in disproportionately high numbers. Bensel, *Political Economy of American Industrialization*, 488–500, esp. tables 7.4 and 7.5 (pp. 494, 496). See also Mehrotra, "Toilers, Tariffs, and the Income Tax Movement," 169; Huston, "Political Response to Industrialism," 48.

62 Arnesen, "American Workers and the Labor Movement," 60. There are, however, obvious limitations to that approach as the organized labor movement was not representative of the whole industrial workforce. First, for obvious reasons, unions from a certain industry tend to represent the opinion of the majority of workers in that industry. Especially in the case of the tariff issue, where the potential benefit or detriment of the tariff affected the industry at large, it is, by design, highly unlikely that a potentially dissenting minority would be represented in the mainstream union representing the workers of a certain industry and carrying their demands into the national labor union. Second, both the American Federation of Labor and the Knights of Labor, which form the focal point of the present analysis, deliberately excluded certain segments of the workforce from their ranks. The AFL, representing craft unionism, mainly comprised skilled white workers; it excluded African Americans, vigorously opposed Asian immigration, and often displayed nativist sentiments toward European immigrants. The Knights of Labor were more ambivalent; that organization explicitly embraced the participation of (European) immigrants, African Americans, and women (in early 1886, arguably at the height of the Knights' influence, both African Americans and women each made up more than 10 percent of the Knights' overall membership), but equally supported exclusion of Asian immigrants. John Enyeart, "Knights of Labor," in *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History*, ed. Eric Arnesen, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 2007), 2:743–747; Jonathan Rees, "American Federation of Labor," in *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History*, ed. Eric Arnesen, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 2007), 1:74–77.

63 Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," 61–62.

64 "Toilers Denounce the Wilson Bill: It Would Rob 500,000 People of Their Means of Employment," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 13, 1894; "Down with the Bill: Toilers Protest Vigorously against the Tariff Outrage," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Apr. 21, 1894; "A High Tariff Army: Four Thousand Men to March on the Capitol To-day," *Washington Post*, Apr. 21, 1894; "One Army Goes Away: Workingmen Present Their Memorial to the Senate," *Washington Post*, Apr. 22, 1894. The APTL took note of the Workingmen's Protective Tariff League's formation and recommended in its journal to "assist in extending these organizations." *American Economist*, Jan. 26, 1894.

65 Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," 60; Mitchell, "Labor and the Tariff Question," 270–71.

66 The APTL, for example, regularly reported on manifestations of protectionist labor sentiment in its press outlets and interpreted them as proof of the League's proposition that protectionism worked mainly for the benefit of industrial laborers. For example, the League covered labor protests against the Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act of 1894. *American Economist*, Jan. 19, 1894, 31, 37; *American Economist*, Mar. 2, 1894, 117–118. Also, the APTL was supportive of Matthew Woll and the WEPC in the late 1920s. *Tariff Review*, May 1927, 170; *Tariff Review*, June 1928, 207; *Tariff Review*, Feb. 1930, 43, 59; *American Economist*, Feb. 5, 1897, 70.

67 Arnesen, "American Workers and the Labor Movement," 59–60.

68 The Knights of Labor, the dominant labor organization of the 1870s and 1880s, followed a similar pattern. It represented, at its peak, roughly 10–12 percent of the working population and had more than 15,000 local chapters. While individual chapters of the organization freely voiced their preferences in trade matters, the vast difference of opinion among them led to a neutral stand on the national level. It was only at the turn of the century when the Knights had lost their position as the dominant labor organization, that they openly favored and promoted tariff reform. Arnesen, "American Workers and the Labor Movement," 60–64; Enyeart, "Knights of Labor," 744–746; Irwin, *Clashing over Commerce*, 242–243; Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," 62; Mehrotra: "Toilers, Tariffs, and the Income Tax Movement," 168–171.

69 Arnesen, "American Workers and the Labor Movement," 64–67; Rees, "American Federation of Labor," 74–77.

70 Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," 55–56.

71 Lyle W. Cooper, "The Tariff and Organized Labor," *American Economic Review* 20 (June 1930): 210–225; Mitchell, "Labor and the Tariff Question," 269. For the quotation, see Federation of Organized Trades and

Labor Unions, *Report of the First Annual Session of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada* (Pittsburgh: Published by Authority of the Federation, 1881), 19.

72 Eventually, the iron and steel workers rejoined the AFL in 1887. Cooper, "The Tariff and Organized Labor," 211–212; Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," 55–56; Mehrotra, "Toilers, Tariffs, and the Income Tax Movement," 172.

73 *American Federationist* 4 (Apr. 1906): 236. See also Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," 56.

74 Leiter, "Organized Labor and the Tariff," 56–57. This neutrality policy in tariff matters also corresponded with the AFL's general approach of "pure and simple unionism," which also entailed scrupulously avoiding clear positions on polarized issues of party politics. Rees, "American Federation of Labor," 74–77.

75 Rees, "American Federation of Labor," 56; American Federation of Labor, *Report of Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (Washington, DC: National Tribune Company, 1907), 334–335.

76 Jennifer A. Delton, *The Industrialists: How the National Association of Manufacturers Shaped American Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 42–46.

77 Eugene V. Debs, *Labor and Freedom: The Voice and Pen of Eugene V. Debs* (St. Louis: Phil Wagner, 1916), 170–171.

78 Some late nineteenth-century American socialists heavily favored free trade following a school of thought that ran through the socialist intellectual tradition from Marx. The official position of the Socialist Party of America, however, only began shifting toward free trade in connection with the anti-imperialism and peace movement during World War I. Then, the party openly endorsed free trade, and Norman Thomas, Debs's successor, and a six-time presidential candidate, was a known and ardent free trader. Marc-William Palen, "Marx and Manchester: The Evolution of the Socialist Internationalist Free-Trade Tradition, c. 1846–1946," *International History Review* 43 (Feb. 2021): 381–398.

79 Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor, 1859–1889* (Philadelphia: Excelsior Publishing, 1890), 222.

80 Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor*, 221.

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