

The People.

VOL. V, NO. 39

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1895

PRICE 3 CENTS

FIRST EDITORIAL

The Fight Is On!

By DANIEL DE LEON

On the 14th inst., Mr. Samuel Gompers was elected by a frail majority of 18 President of the A.F. of L. Though his rival, John McBride, can in no way be considered a Socialist, yet the election of Mr. Gompers was a plain declaration of war to Socialism by pure and simpledom and the labor fakirs, who, backed by the capitalists, conducted Mr. Gompers' campaign. His election was to be the reward for his having traduced the Socialist movement of all Europe in an interview which was widely published by the capitalist press and reproduced unrepudiated by him, in his two pet organs—the *Bakers' Journal* and the *Paterson Labor Standard*—and for his strenuous efforts to delay as much as possible the unification of American labor and its solidarity with the workers of the world.

We hail the act of the majority that won. Nothing so much conduces to the clarification of issues as their being distinctly joined. The election of Mr. Gompers and the fraternal feelings expressed by his lieutenants for the Washington crew of K. of L. fakirs, is but a logical result of the launching of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance and of the conditions that give birth to this well-planted organization.

Pure and simple misleaders and ignoramuses, seeking charter fees and dues, on the one side, New Trade Unionists, on the other, wielding the flaming sword of Science and Truth, that is as it should be.

If in the past we have been unsparing with these outposts of capitalism—the labor bunco-steerers—we shall in the future smite them still more relentlessly; the sledge hammer of facts shall drop henceforth all the more pitilessly upon the numskulls, whose perverse ignorance and ignorant perversity are mainly responsible for the rapid degradation into which our working class is sinking; and it will drop down upon their skulls with all the greater vigor by reason of the inspiration received from the evident progress that New Trade Unionism is making.

* * *

That these views express the views generally held of the situation, two events that took place last Sunday amply verify. The New York City Central Labor Federation adopted this declaration:

“We welcome the election of Sam Gompers to the presidency of the so-called American Federation of Labor as the logical, necessary and timely climax of the conflict which for a long time, and more especially during the past six years, has been raging between the labor fakirs of this country for the perpetuation of their misleadership, and the International Socialist movement for the organization of the wage-working class with a view to its complete emancipation.

“Thanks to the firm attitude of our comrades, the mask of hypocrisy lately worn by the fakirs, both in the A.F. of L. and in the Order of the K. of L., has been torn away. Sam Gompers no longer falsely pretends—as he did at the Detroit Convention in 1890, at the reception of the French delegates in 1893, and even two months ago at meetings in the State of New York—that he is a Socialist in disguise. “War to Socialism” is the outspoken declaration upon which he is now elected by his fellow-fakirs, and his election is hailed by the organs of capitalism with even greater delight than were the recent utterances of General Miles and Chief Conlin in favor of ‘bullets, grape and canister.’

“The lines are drawn and the battle is engaged. On one side stand the Gomperite fakirs, at the head of a distracted army, numbering barely 210,000 wage workers, that their misleaders not only propose to decimate by reckless exposure to the destructive fire of concentrated capital, but to waylay from year to year into deeper slavery through the traps and ambushes of the plutocratic parties.

“On the other side rises the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance, calling upon the millions of unorganized workers to rally under the banner of emancipation. Thousands of the Knights have already answered its appeal, and in the front ranks of the A.F. of L. are thousands of Socialists and sympathizers ready to shake off the betrayers of the working class.

“With the election of Gompers by his Federated Fakirs, following closely the repudiation of Sovereign and his rascally crew by bona fide Knights of Labor, the American labor movement has entered a new phase. To International Socialism the future now unquestionably belongs, and the Central Labor Federation, which first raised the banner of New Trade

Unionism, expects from every one of its affiliated organizations and from every member thereof, the utmost devotion and activity in the performance of the plain duties imposed by the new conditions.”

* * *

The second event took place in the New York Central Labor Union—an organization with whose reactionary tendencies we have been at war for the last five years.

A fakir, Johnson, there offered the following for adoption:

“RESOLVED, That we find the re-election of Samuel Gompers as President of the American Federation of Labor a reason for special gratification, because it indicates a vigorous and timely resistance to the crafty tactics of those Socialists who unwisely insist upon the disruption of trade unions as the condition precedent to their Co-operative Commonwealth.”

A few years ago, when New Trade Unionism or Socialism was still weak, such a resolution would have passed with a whoop; at that time it was fun to “go for” the Socialists. Since then, however, the bantam has grown to a fighting chanticleer; his spurs, though not yet what they give assured promise of becoming, are robust and have been felt; the future, it is full well realized, is his. Consequently, to monkey now with the Socialists has lost its old-time fascination for the wise. The resolution was vehemently opposed by delegates of bona fide unions, who frankly deprecated a conflict with the Socialists. Then David B. Hill’s heeler, a man called John Bogert, began manoeuvring, but no manoeuvring or sugar coating of the original pill would go down the throats of the experienced majority.

An amendment was proposed to the effect that the reference to the Socialists be stricken out. Then a substitute for the whole was proposed in the form of a motion that the secretary should send a congratulatory letter to Gompers. The substitute was put and lost. It was then decided, as the amendment was the same in intent as the substitute, to put the original motion. The original motion was lost. A division was called for, and it was lost again. The foolhardy emissaries of the A.F. of L. then made a last desperate effort. They demanded a roll call. The roster of each union was called, and the motion was lost a third time by a larger majority than before—18 against 28!

* * *

We are ready for the fray. It had to come sooner or later. Not until it is fought out will the breach have been made in the outer breastworks of capitalism. The noblest aspirations of man fire our hosts onward.

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

Uploaded March 24, 2003