

Editorial: Caught In His Own Meshes

At last year's convention of the American Federation of Labor, Mr. Samuel Gompers declared with much unction, and has since frequently repeated with much gratification: "Whichever way the trades unions lead, I will follow; whatever 'ism' they make theirs becomes mine."

One might question the propriety of a "head's" filling a tail's mission; one might expect that he who calls himself the "head" should do some "leading," instead of being satisfied with doing the "trailing" or "following." But without entering into a criticism of this aspect of the case, let us take this declaration as being honestly, however ignobly, meant. From it the inference would be justified that Mr. Gompers is modestly satisfied with suppressing his own ideals, plan and "isms{,}" however fond he may be of them; that, if he upholds or opposes any "ism," it is simply in deference to the will of his "rank and file," whatever his own opinions might be; in short, that he will keep his hands off all discussions upon any proposed "ism," allow his "rank and file" to do the headwork of thinking and deciding without interference on his part, and reserve to himself the tail function of wagging approval. This inference is not only justified in the abstract, it has been corroborated by Mr. Gompers himself on the all important subject of the necessity of independent political action on the part of the workingmen. Mr. Gompers opposes such action, claiming all along that his "rank and file" does not want it, and as his

Daniel De Leon

maxim was to follow his “rank and file,” he stood up against New Trade-Unionism with its independent political action clause.

So far, one would say, there was at least no inconsistency.

But murder WILL out! At the Milwaukee convention of cigarmakers, held end of last month, a motion was made favoring independent political action by the workers. Mr. Gompers was present. Obedient to his motto of obediently wagging assent to any “ism” the trade-unions should adopt, one should expect that he would have been a silent spectator at the debate, ready simply to wag assent as soon as a decision was arrived at. But no! all of a sudden the tail moved upwards towards the head, and so far from being ready to follow it sailed in to lead. Mr. Gompers opposed vehemently the proposition!

Nor is this all. In opposing political action in this case, Mr. Gompers claimed he did so because the motion contemplated “a certain” political party. Again one is hereby led to infer that Mr. Gompers’s objections are not to independent political action in itself, but to its manifestation in connection with “a certain” political party. It cannot be denied that such a thing is possible as to realize the futility of the “pure and simple” trade union, and yet object to “a certain” independent political party; why, might not some innocent ask, may not this be the case with Mr. Samuel Gompers? But here too murder WILL out. If that were the case why in all the numerous years that he brags about having “sacrificed” himself to the cause of labor has he never taken the first step to start the political party of labor that would suit him.

These are not the only two instances of this sort of contradiction in which Mr. Gompers is caught. But they suffice to justify two conclusions:

1. In upholding “pure and simple” he does so in deference to his own wishes; he tells a deliberate falsehood when he claims his conduct is directed by the wishes of the “rank and file.”

2. In giving as his reason for opposing independent political

Caught In His Own Meshes

action, that he only opposes “a certain” political party, he deliberately plays cuttle-fish.

Mr. Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, is an entrapped swindler.

The People, Vol. III, No. 28. Sunday, October 8, 1893

Caught In His Own Meshes

*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
Official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.*

Uploaded October 2002