
Statement in Reply to Samuel Gompers: Press Release Distributed September 4, 1908 by Eugene V. Debs

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On the Red Special,
en route to Denver, Sept. 4 [1908].

A few weeks ago I ventured the opinion that the so-called Anti-Injunction plank of the Democratic party was a false pretense to catch the votes of the ignorant, and in effect meaningless. This seems to have given a fit to Mr. Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor. In the September [1908] issue of his personal organ, *The American Federationist*, he has covered several pages with a tirade of misrepresentations and falsehood.¹ I have little time to waste upon Mr. Gompers, but what I have to say will be to the point.

After twenty-five years of his brilliant leadership the trade union movement is stripped of its power, by court decisions and otherwise, and is practically paralyzed and helpless. In the state of Alabama, 6,000 miners who have been helping to pay his salary have been

¹ The polemical editorial by Gompers, entitled "Debs, the Apostle of Failure," appears in Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino (eds.), *The Samuel Gompers Papers: Volume 7*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 401-405. Gompers invites his readers to "compare anything Debs may say with the most virulent attacks upon Labor by the [David M.] Parry/[Charles W.] Post/[James W.] Van Cleave gang" and to "note the remarkable similarity about them — then it becomes easy to guess as to where Debs gets his inspiration, and possibly even his financial backing." Gompers charges Debs with attempting to "disorganize the workers, lead them astray from the vital issues," and to "corral their votes" in de facto "assistance to the Republican Party." Gompers goes on to denigrate Debs as leader of the American Railway Union, mocking the way that he vainly wore a false halo of martyrdom as a result of that organization's legal travails as a byproduct of its failed 1894 strike.

crushed by the iron heel of the Democratic administration to which he has pledged his support in the present campaign. In all his official career Gompers has not only never won a victory, but has never been in a fight worth mentioning except at a safe distance from the battlefield.

During all this time he has been violently opposed to any political activity on the part of the trade unions, and when he was finally forced from his attitude of “pure and simple” unionism, it was to negotiate with capitalist parties for the support of his benighted followers. In other words, when he was at last driven into politics he used all his influence to steer union men into the shambles of a capitalist party.

It was only a short time after August Belmont, the agent of the Rothschilds, had crushed the strike of the subway employees in New York with the aid of [James A.] Farley and his army of strikebreakers, that Belmont and Gompers sat together as boon companions at the same sumptuous festal board.

Every essential statement respecting me in his tirade is either a flagrant misrepresentation or an unqualified falsehood, and Gompers, the labor leader, who has always led backward knows it.

To test his sincerity I challenge him to meet me before his followers and the general public anywhere in the United States, Washington, the headquarters of the federation, preferred. I know the gentleman’s record. He has charged me with being a failure, but I venture the opinion that if he will meet me — which he will not, for he will have to “catch a train” — he will agree that I am not a failure at exposing a cowardly falsifier and in making his own deluded followers repudiate him with indignation and contempt.

Mr. Gompers stood before his last convention and told how he had spurned a bribe offered him by wicked capitalists, and was frantically cheered by his followers for what was a blot upon his honor and an insult to their intelligence.

This statement is not made by me as a Socialist candidate and the Socialist Party is in no wise responsible for it. The attack of Gompers was upon my labor record, for which I alone am responsible

Eugene V. Debs.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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