

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 9, NO. 15.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 1908.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

NOT BEGGING, BUT DOING.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MR. SAMUEL GOMPERS did not invent the saying: “He who would be free must himself strike the blow.” But, although not the inventor, Mr. Gompers must be given credit for being the popularizer in the country of that rousing slogan. Oftener than any other one man, oftener than any thousand men in the country has Mr. Gompers used the phrase. He used it in speeches manifold, he used it in articles untold. Indeed, he made the phrase do overwork. It was trotted out in sunshine and in rain, on week days and on holidays. So inseparable did the slogan grow from the lips and pen of Mr. Gompers that Gompers and the slogan began to be justly considered as one—Gompers the paladin of “he who would be free must himself strike the blow”; and the slogan “he who would be free must himself strike the blow” the soul and substance of Gompers.

Acts define words.

Mr. Gompers now declares in favor of the Democratic party. Says he: “We received nothing in Chicago; a great deal in Denver.”

This declaration is an ACT, the previous declaration was WORDS. The act defines the words.

Mr. Gompers’s slogan now is defined to read:

“He who would be free must beg.”

To “receive” implies previous begging. “Begging” is not “striking”—unless the striking of the ear-drum is the striking meant.

With this fuller definition, Mr. Gompers’s slogan reads:

“He who would be free must himself strike the ear-drum of his enslaver.”

We always thought that was Mr. Gompers’s meaning. Somehow none who watched the gentleman closely could really believe he meant the words in their usual acceptance. Somehow there was ever detectable the quaver of the poltroon

when Gompers shot off the slogan—that quaver that all are familiar with who ever heard the wild blood-and-thunder ranters of the Movement, and whose mind’s eye could readily see the ranter hiding behind the nearest bed when the hour of danger should have actually appeared.

The Labor or Socialist Movement does not go from house to house abegging. It started that way in the days of its infancy, before it acquired its “sea-legs,” and did not understand its mission. To-day the Socialist or Labor Movement, that deserves the name, beggeth not. The part of it that begs, or feels constrained to play the dandy, is the submerged part. That part has not yet risen above the deluge of capitalism, least of all has it crystallized into the granite-ribbed rock that bends not, resists all storms and actions of the economic-political atmosphere, and becomes solid ground on which to stand and build—and do.

Gompers abegging and receiving crumbs, and smirking with contentment at the receipt, well symbolizes the gentleman’s triple office of “President,” “Editor” and, last not least, “Undertaker” of the Civic-Federationized system of Unionism.

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

Uploaded March 2010

slpns@slp.org