

Political Action (June 30, 1906)

The tardy acknowledgment now comes from President Gompers of the American Federation of Labor that a labor lobby at a capitalist Congress is a failure, and that organized labor must betake itself to the field of political action. In arriving at this conclusion Mr. Gompers, the leading leader of labor, is about a quarter of a century behind his more intelligent followers. The hundreds of thousands of dollars spent by organized labor in maintaining lobbies at the seats of capitalist legislative bodies, elected by the votes of labor, have been wasted in a vain and hopeless cause.

The Republican and Democratic parties are capitalist parties, committed to capitalist principles and policies, and to expect them to legislate in the interest of the working class upon whose fleecings depend their power and prestige, is about as reasonable as to expect a tropical sun to convert sour milk into ice cream.

In his address before the convention of the International Steel and Copper Plate Printers' Union a few days ago President Gompers is reported to have said that he was "tired of seeing the laboring man made a plaything of by the politician."¹ Indeed! Since when? Has President Gompers just make this discovery since he and his cabinet were turned down cold and flat by President Roosevelt, Vice President Fairbanks,² and Speaker Cannon?³

And why should not the president of the United States treat with contempt the presumptuous obtusion of the officials of the American Federation of Labor? They don't represent anything nor anybody, but themselves, in any political sense, and well does the capitalist Roosevelt administration know it. When you approach a capitalist politician you must have money or political power to back you up; otherwise you are turned down and out.

Continuing his address to the Copper Plate Printers, Mr. Gompers said: "What we have a right to do is to take the hand of the oppressor from our throats and his foot from our breasts by the exercise of our sovereign political rights."

Isn't Mr. Gompers getting a little rash? Why not convene the Civic Federation in extraordinary session? The language of Mr. Gompers would

seem to indicate that he is in desperate straits and laboring under great excitement; that the stranglehold on his throat is getting the better of him, and that the foot on his breastbone is getting in its deadly work, and yet I never knew Mr. Gompers to risk his throat or breastbone in the lead of any great strike or within range of any injunction or gatling gun.

If at long range Mr. Gompers so keenly feels the hand on his throat and the foot on his breast, how would he feel if his leadership had been fearless enough to put him where Moyer and Haywood are?

The truth is that the heated rhetoric of Mr. Gompers is nothing but a foolish bluff. It means nothing and the politicians will pay no more attention to it than would an alligator to a flea bite.

Mr. Gompers and his official colleagues have been literally driven to the verge of socialism and are now making their last stand against working class political action. When they talk about the "exercise of political rights" they don't mean that the working class shall vote as a unit, the only possible way that anything can be accomplished; they mean that in the future, as in the past, the labor vote shall be divided between the Republican and Democratic parties, provided only that men "friendly to labor" shall be elected.

A candidate "friendly to labor" on a capitalist ticket and on a capitalist platform! Of all the bunko deals that have ever victimized labor this is the favorite of the ward heeler and labor fakir — and the worst in the whole bunch.

At the late meeting of the executive council of the American Federation of Labor, Mr. Hearst, invited by Mr. Gompers to give the council the benefit of his advice in the matter of political action, said, among other things: "I would not have the workmen go into politics as partisans." Precisely! Mr. Hears would not have wage slaves go into politics *as a class*. He does not say that, but that is what he means, and he doubtless received a hearty amen from the Gompers cabinet.

Political action, to be of any value to labor, must be by the working class for the working class, and this is socialism, and anything less may hurt but will not help in any appreciable degree the exploited slaves of capitalism.

More and more the demand for economic and political unity is being pressed by the rank and file. Industrial unionism instead of trade division — solidarity instead of segregation! The evolutionary process has decreed it and it is bound to come.

The next few months will be vital ones for the labor movement. The time is opportune for our most vigorous propaganda. Subscriptions to socialist papers should now be increased to their maximum and in this very necessary work every comrade and sympathizer should lend hand and heart, as also in the spread of other literature, and this should be kept up with increasing activity until the close of the campaign.

Our good comrades are still in the prison pens of the plutocracy, but their skies are brightening, and in good time they will join their loved ones again. The mine owning brigands dare not try them and will not release them. The trial has now been postponed until after the election. This appeals clarion-tongued to the workers of the nation for political action.

Sever your relations, ye workers — as clean and complete as if with the keen edge of the sword of wrath — with the Republican and Democratic parties who are responsible for the infamous outrages perpetrated upon our comrades, Moyer, Haywood, St. John, and Pettibone, and for numberless other crimes suffered by the children of toil. Join the Socialist Party ad register at once your protest and your high resolve by casting your vote for *the Emancipation of Labor and the Socialist Republic*.

Published in *Chicago Socialist*, vol. 6, whole no. 382 (June 30, 1906), p. 1.

¹ Gompers made his remarks on June 21, 1906 in a speech in Washington, DC, to open the 14th annual convention of the International Steel and Copper Plate Printers' Union. One version quotes Gompers as saying: "We are tired of being the plaything and football of politicians.... I don't look for the millennium through the ballot box. It comes through a man's own heart. What we want to accomplish in politics is to take the hand of the oppressor of organized labor from our throats." See: *Houston Post*, June 22, 1906, p. 1.

² Charles W. Fairbanks (1852-1918), a conservative Republican senator from Indiana, was elected vice president of the United States in 1904. He was also the party's nominee for the same position in 1916 as part of a losing ticket headed by Charles Evans Hughes.

³ Joseph G. Cannon (1836-1926), a conservative Republican from Illinois, was the powerful speaker of the House of Representatives for eight years, ending in 1912. He was a member of Congress for a total of 46 years and the namesake of the first congressional office building, completed in 1908.