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EDITORIAL

GOMPERS AND THE CONSTITUTION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AN appeal has been issued by Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, to the labor unions in this State, urging them to use every means in their power to get votes for the labor amendment to the State Constitution, which will be voted on at the coming election. This amendment would give the legislature the power to regulate the wages, hours of work and conditions to prevail on all municipal and State work.

The amendment was drafted owing to the agitation of the labor unions, because the eight hour and prevailing rate of wages and one or two other laws of the same kind have been declared unconstitutional by the Court of Appeals. Gompers says: "The courts have been usurping the powers of the Legislature."

Gompers would lead intelligent workingmen to infer from his appeal that constitutional rights cannot be usurped. Gompers conveniently overlooks Colorado. The Colorado conflict was due to the usurpation of constitutional rights. The people of Colorado adopted an eight hour amendment to the constitution by an overwhelming majority. The Western Federation sought to enforce it, and inaugurated a campaign to that end. The Mine Owners' Association opposed this action. The result was an open violation by the Mine Owners' Association, Gov. Peabody, the Legislature, and the Judiciary, not only of this right, but of all constitutional rights in some counties,—in fact, the constitution was there suspended, and the dictatorship of Gov. Peabody was substituted instead. This worthy labor constitutionalist, Gompers, ably assisted in the usurpation of Colorado's constitution. Prior to the Cripple Creek disaster, he sent letters to the Colorado unions urging them to withdraw support from the Western Federation of Miners. After the Independence Mine disaster, Ralph Easley, Secretary of the Civic Federation, of which Gompers is vice-president, on behalf of the American

Federation of Labor's Executive Board, sent a telegram to Gov. Peabody ordering that no discrimination should be made against members of the A.F. of L. It is on record that Gov. Peabody said: "We have no objections against organizations working in harmony with the capitalist class." Peabody had no objection to Gompers's A.F. of L. because it is practically an auxiliary of that class in all its usurpations.

In view of these facts, it is plain that in this constitutional matter, Gompers is merely acting as a capitalist political bellwether. Knowing full well, as every intelligent man must know, that law is of no value until enforced, and that no law is enforced except by those to whom its value redounds, he deludes the workingmen into believing that they can pass anti-capitalist laws that the anti-labor governments of capitalism will enforce in their interests. By these means, Gompers keeps the workingmen bound to the chariot of capitalist politics, behind which they are yanked around the legislative arena to their economic and political detriment, as illustrated by Colorado.

Labor will know no enforcement of the constitution in its favor, until it makes the constitution synonymous with itself. This it can do by capturing the powers of State and wielding them according to the dictates of its interests, through a class conscious industrial union and a working class political party. These are already in existence and are known as the Industrial Workers of the World and the Socialist Labor Party respectively. Join them, if you desire true constitutionalism.

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

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