

EDITORIAL

## THE SWEDISH “FIASCO.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE photographic reproduction, published on this issue’s front page,<sup>1</sup> of a leading Swedish capitalist paper, as it is appearing now during the general strike, and as a sample of how the rest of its “esteemed contemporaries” look, presents a monumental, a historic picture. As nothing happens by accident, the presence, at this very season, of Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, in Europe on a mission to A.F. of Hellize the European Labor Movement, is a companion piece, or contrast, that the logic of events is supplying to the picture.

Were one asked what one Gompersian trick, more than any other, brings about the paralytic state that the workingmen of the land might find themselves in, the answer would be—the Trick of the Contract.

By means of the “Contract,” so-called, that Gompersism causes its men to enter into with the employer, the complete disorganization of our proletariat is accomplished.

In shops where the men are unorganized, so-called, the employer is in constant danger. The natural class instinct of the men, not being numbed by “Contracts,” is apt to assert itself at any moment, and has frequently so asserted itself. A wrong, resented by any one of the several crafts in a shop, is forthwith resented by all. There being no “Contract” to hold back the kindred crafts which “have no grievance,” the employer has to do with all the crafts at once, and he is exposed at any moment to see his whole shop vacated—a serious proposition for him.

It is otherwise in the shops “organized” by Gompersism. There, each of the several crafts has a special “Contract” with the employer. The “Contracts” expire on different dates. The effect is to place the men in the employer’s power. If he has a

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<sup>1</sup> [To be inserted.—R.B.]

row with any one of the crafts, that particular craft has to fight it out with him single handed. The "Contracts" bind the others' hands and feet—a much easier proposition to meet.

Accordingly, no set of men are so thoroughly disorganized, and, therefore, so utterly under the thumb of the employer, as the so-called organized ones under the Gompers system.

The full effects, immediate and remote, of the system are obvious:—

As to the men "organized" under Gompersism, they can not move together, and, therefore, are beaten separately, with the regularity of clock-work.

As to the men who are unorganized, so-called, their spontaneity of action is impaired by the system. Seeing that Gompers wraps himself in the mantle of "Unionism," and that he has succeeded in mystifying the popular mind with the superstition that he represents Unionism, the employer has at hand the ready means to check-mate, under the cloak of "Unionism," any spontaneous manifestation of class solidarity on the part of his unorganized, or of his class-consciously organized employes. All he has to do is to call upon Gompers to "organize" his shop; and the thing is done by the introduction of A.F. of L. men to take the places of the men on strike, or by the "organizing" of the strike-breakers whom the employer may have got. Thus Gompersism has a deterrent effect upon the manliness of conduct of the workers who do not pay Gompers tribute.

The upshot of it all is that, through Gompersism, the American Labor Movement is smitten with locomotor ataxia. 'Tis done by the Trick of the Contract.

That there can be no "Contract" between wage slave and master is obvious. The two are not peers, consequently, not of contracting status. The wage slave acts under compulsion. The "Contract" between the two is a contract for the worker to turn scab. But piously does Gompers fold his hands, turn his eyes heavenward, and declare: "We respect our contracts!" Like an up-to-date Pharisee, he thanks God he is not like those others, the men of the I.W.W., for instance, who repudiate their "sacred contracts," and are proud of it.

The Swedish "Fiasco" holds up a picture that Gompers and Gompersism serve as a striking and timely contrast to. Contract or no Contract, the printers of Sweden struck in unison with their fellow wage slaves. Their sense of class solidarity spoke

as loudly as did the sense of class solidarity with the other Unions which "had no grievance"; it rose as the SUPREME CONTRACT, the class contract, that binds the working class of all countries, nationalities, races and colors, and it asserted itself in the effective manner that the Swedish capitalist papers are bearing testimony to, as per sample in this issue.

It is possible, however improbable, that the Swedish working class may succumb in the present battle. But there is this difference—

The workers under Gompersism, regularly routed, it couldn't be otherwise, in successive, disconnected guerillas, go down each time ignominiously, so ignominiously that their Unions are generally reduced to mere skeletons, the members lose faith in themselves, they spread disheartenment over the land, and they draw upon the country the contempt of the outside world.

The workers of Sweden, on the contrary, if indeed they should be ultimately overcome in the present struggle, would go down with glory, so gloriously that their defeat would be fertile ashes from which they would re-rise, and re-rise again, spreading each time encouragement within, and far and wide beyond the frontiers of their own land. Their defeat, if come it must, would be but a stepping stone to ultimate triumph, in contrast with the Gompersic defeats, each one of which sinks the workers deeper down.

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

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