

The AF of L, What It Says and What It Does

By Daniel De Leon

The AF of L claims to “unite” the workers; nay, more, in its “open letter to ministers of the Gospel,” it says: “Our mission is the redemption of the workers from the bondage of industrial slavery.” Nice sounding phrases are these, and satisfying to some, but how do they work out in their application?

In the first place, it is a well-known fact that the AF of L does not unite the workers. Granting the wildest claims of AF of L officers as to membership, only a minority of the workers are organized.

The AF of L, as at present constituted, could not organize the workers even if it would. Its scheme of organization makes no provision for the reserve army of labor. Hence it organizes, not the men, but the jobs, in certain lines of production, the lines in which the wages permit the paying of dues and assessments.

Nor does it organize, nor desire to organize, all the workers even in the trades “organized.” It has so many jobs, hence it wants only so many men. It has no use for jobless men. It discourages them, should they seek admission, by its high initiation fees and other disheartening conditions.

When it comes to “redemption of the workers from the bondage of industrial slavery” the words are used as so much claptrap. The AF of L, far from abolishing “industrial slavery,” is committed to the capitalist system—the system of wage slavery. It promulgates the theory that the capitalist and the worker are brothers; it justifies its own existence as the arbiter between the brothers, when they have spats, as brothers will.

The AF of L, except when Sammy Gompers makes a little incursion into the field of partisan politics, is nonpartisan. That alone proves the nonlabor character of the AF of L. A union, worth anything at all, would be a strict partisan of labor. Its politics would logically have to be the classconscious politics of the working class, socialist politics, because it is clear that no other politics could, or ever would, promote the interests of labor.

It is clear to those who look beyond their noses that the AF of L can never make good its claim to be the labor movement. Its economic and sociologic groundwork is false. It ignores the class struggle; the word “capital” is Greek to it; it knows of the nature of the merchandise “labor” only in the sense that it does a brokerage business in it.

Even with “good” men such a falsely constructed body would go wrong at nearly every step. Engineered by men who know that they stand on a false basis, insofar as the interests of the workers are concerned, the thing must go wrong at every step.

A labor organization to be effective, must get away from the capitalist idea of cornering the merchandise labor power; it must bend its efforts

DANIEL DE LEON

toward overthrowing the system of industrial slavery. The AF of L is really an upholder of the very system from which it declares it is going to redeem the workers. It is therefore just what *The Wall Street Journal* acclaimed it—a bulwark of the existing order.

Daily People, August 28, 1910
Socialist Labor Party