

(November 15th.)

What the American Federation of Labour Signifies.

BY SAMUEL GOMPERS.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club, on the subject: "What the American Federation of Labour Signifies." Mr. Samuel Gompers said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club,—You will pardon me if I dispense with a formal acknowledgement of the very courteous introduction of your honored President. I have but a few minutes, a very few minutes, for the discussion of a great question, and I do not want to dissipate a single moment of the twenty-five minutes of your and my luncheon.

What does the American Federation of Labour signify? It is not an organization. It is a federation of organizations. The organizations had a prior existence. The organization of the various Trades and Labour unions was the result of economic, industrial and commercial conditions. They kept pace with the development of these conditions. When the industry was primitive and local, associations were founded among the workers in the various localities. But industry developed; wealth concentrated; ownership passed hands from individuals to partnerships, and companies, and corporations, and trusts, and became national. Then the Labour movement spread out and developed until it, too, became national. It developed into a federation designed to better meet the new conditions which arose.

If I were asked to tell you in a phrase what the Federation of Labour signifies I should put it thus: A standing protest against all wrong, inhumanity and injustice; a defender and promoter of all that is good and true and noble. There is no wrong against which it does not and will not protest, and there is nothing right, really belonging to the people, for which it does not and will not contest.

Mr. Samuel Gompers has been for a quarter of a century President of the American Federation of Labour, which held its convention in Toronto in November, 1909. He is, perhaps, the most outstanding figure in the organized labour movement in America.

I take it that all of us, as thinking men, realize that though conditions are far better than they have ever been in our time, they are not yet what we would have them. There is no man whose interest is in time and for the future but has ideals, notions, if you will, day-dreams of some solution some day to eliminate the wrongs from civilized life. There is the question of time, of circumstances, of position in life. There are some who think the great millenium lies far, far, in the distant future. There are others, again, who look for it in the course of a century or so. And there are some impatient spirits who expect it immediately and will brook no delay. Whether it be the multi-millionaire; whether it be the fairly-situated business man; whether it be the middle man, or the working man, or the poor devil who walks the streets of your city, or the cities of the American continent or of Europe, there throbs in his mind and heart the hope of a change, a great change that will correct the wrongs existing. There is the inborn conviction, the knowledge, that all these things will change some time.

The American Federation of Labour signifies work applied to make to-morrow a better day than to-day, and to make every succeeding day better than the one just closed. And it works along rational lines of evolution and the process of man's growing needs and advancement.

My friends, the discontent which exists with existing wrongs finds expression at different times and in different countries quite differently. The American Federation Union movement, in which the Canadian workers are on absolute equality with the United States' workers, and, that there may be no invidious inference drawn, let me say that the United States' workers are absolutely the equals of the Canadian participants. This is one great American continental Labour movement.

The Labour movement of America is cut upon the same lines as the Labour movement of Great Britain. It is working along evolutionary lines, while in some other countries the discontent works along lines of attempts at revolution and hopes for revolution. I would impress upon your minds that in all the world life, property and comfort are nowhere more secure than in countries where the Federation Union movement finds its best expression.

I understand that certain employers of labour and business men look on the Labour movement with its incidental strikes and boycott, as something to be annihilated. Consider for a moment what conditions would be if there did not exist on

the North American continent the American Labour movement. Neither you nor I want the inconvenience caused by a disruption of relations existing between employer and employed. But it is not a question of strike, but of the power to strike and the right to strike. This is the weapon in the hands of the workers that gives warning to greed, that gives warning to rapacity, that gives warning to tyranny that thus far they shall come and no farther. I can truly say that I have yet to meet the man in the Labour movement who is not ready to exert every influence and power to avert and avoid strikes. The question, I repeat, is not necessarily the strike, but the power to strike and the right to strike, that is the great check upon wrong and injustice. In the present era of wealth concentration, with labour specialized and subdivided so that the modern worker finds himself a mere cog in the wheel of industry, something is needed. If you can imagine concentrated wealth and power on the one hand and people unorganized on the other, what, pray you, would be your conclusion as to the lot of the working people of Canada? Our movement is the association of workers, skilled and unskilled, bereft of their individuality by the wonderful progress in machine production and development, but gaining in association by reason of their great economic and industrial power, and winning back for them their social importance.

The men of labour dislike strikes. They dislike them as much as anyone. But they must be the final protest of the workers against injustice and further encroachment on their rights. When Lord Charles Beresford was in Canada he called attention to the fact that there would be few controversies between employer and employed if the employer would get down from his high horse and deal with the men of labour the same as he deals with his other business associates.

My friends, ours is a rough struggle. It embodies the masses. Canada is a great agricultural country, but she has not yet become an industrial country. Though the United States has grown fast industrially during the last quarter of a century, she, too, is an agricultural country. There are those who draw comparisons. Well, they say, you have three million in your organization, but we have ninety or ninety-seven million inhabitants in our country and in Canada. Friends, it won't hold. The American Labour movement has three million men. This means more than three to ninety-six in the whole population. There are the wives and children to be reckoned on. They estimate I understand on five to a family. At this rate we have fifteen millions to the ninety-

five or ninety-six. When one considers that the agricultural districts are people with unorganized labour, it shows that the industries are largely organized.

A man may say that he cannot agree with me. That is all right. It may be his fault or it may be mine. But I know this, that I am one hundred per cent. right in my own mind. In industries such as printing, building and other trades, they are organized from seventy-five to ninety-five per cent., but, pity 'tis 'tis true many of the others are yet unorganized. Nevertheless this great organized majority certainly have the right to speak for their fellow workers in trade.

But I must hurry on. Time flies. I feel a bit like the young lad who had five minutes to speak and said he would speak on the past, present and future of the human family, and in the time that was left he would discuss some other subject. I am conscious of being cramped for time, yours and mine.

Workers and business men alike realize this fact that, taking it from the standpoint of commercial, political or social success, progress in civilization depends upon the welfare of the working people. We are striving, as we are given light, to assist our fellows in their demands on modern society. They ask, and we ask, in return for service rendered to society, that they be entitled to a living wage, not treated like a mule in the mines. We want better homes, better factories, better workshops, better conditions in the mines. Yes, in the mines where that awful holocaust occurred only a few hours ago. We want the risks of labour reduced.

They talk about the risks of capital. My God, men! Think of the risks of labour. We want a better life in America, both on this and the other side of the international line. We're men, all over the world. We're humans. And the burdens toil has had to bear for centuries are getting too heavy. It is intelligently conscious of its rights, and it is entering its plea for humanity, its protest against injustice. We want a nobler manhood, a more beautiful womanhood and a happier and brighter childhood. We want to make the world of to-day and to-morrow the marvel of the dreamers of the past. We want to make the present with its greatness and grandeur and progress as the dark ages of brutality and ignorance compared with what the future holds in store.

I have been reading in the paper—I don't know whether it is an editorial, an article, or an advertisement—some sentiments that apply to us all: As for the climber, he should remember

that it is not enough to carry his own load. Selfish and narrow men may do that, but he is not in that class of men. It is not necessary for a man to be heartless because he finds the up-hill path a hard one. Neither is it necessary for him to make a stepping-stone of his fellow man. He should make a stepping-stone of every failure he has experienced during the past, and when he sees a fellow climber on the direct road to failure, he should do more than sit down and study his own road-map. There is only one real success, only one goal worth the winning. The climber will need more than mere strength to win it. Courage, sympathy and gentleness are required of him, if he would make the grade.

The climber should not be satisfied with himself simply because he is doing all that his world seems to expect of him. If the Creator had not intended that he should strive for certain heights He would not have given him wisdom above the lower animals. Every man who is satisfied with a mere living should remember that it is just as instinctive for the wolf of the forest or eagle of the air to gain a mere living, as it is for him. Let him keep his eye on the eagle and soar aloft. Let him be not merely one of a million, but one in a million.

It must be recognized that nothing can be achieved without trial, nothing accomplished without courage and enthusiasm.

The application is alike to men of labour and business. We cannot afford to live for ourselves alone, for, whatever other conception we may have, we *are* our brother's keeper.