

The Democratic Injunction Plank (August 8, 1908)

In reply to numerous inquiries as to what I think of the alleged anti-injunction plank of the Democratic Party, I have to say that it is a delusion and a snare, a fraud and a false pretense, without the shadow of an element to redeem it from condemnation.¹

It was incorporated as a political bait to catch labor suckers and for no other purpose. Democratic politicians are not one whit more friendly to organized labor than are Republican politicians, and their party record in Congress and in state legislatures proves it.

The so-called injunction plank adopted at Denver, when analyzed, is found to mean nothing, and it is not improved in the least by Mr. Gompers's puerile elucidation.²

During my official connection with organized labor, I had injunctions issued against me by the courts from the Atlantic to the Pacific — more than has ever been issued against any labor union official before or since — and I may, therefore, I hope, without presumption, claim attention when that subject is under discussion.

The injunction is one of the most effective weapons the capitalist class has in keeping the working class in subjection, and it has no more intention of surrendering the rapid fire instrument, or suffering it to be turned into a flintlock, than it has of surrendering the profit it gouges out of its enslaved and enjoined victims.

The labor injunction is one of the tentacles of capitalism and will never be destroyed until capitalism itself is destroyed; and the Democratic plank purporting to defend organized labor against it is a rank counterfeit, an unadulterated sham, an unmitigated fraud.

From free silver in 1896, the Democratic Party has turned to gold bricks in 1908, and that is the only change it has undergone.

For a quarter of a century Gompers, of the American Federation of Labor, shrieked “no politics” as the slogan of union labor. The logic of events, and the socialist movement, have at last driven him from his reactionary position, and now his banner is no longer inscribed “No Politics,” but instead “Into the Democratic Party.” No wonder Belmont³ and Carnegie regard him as a safe leader of the working class.

Let every union man consider well the spectacle of Gompers, whose whole official career has been one of mad opposition to the political activity of union labor, now attempting to steer the trade union movement into the shambles of the Democratic Party.

Gompers does not dare to stand on any public platform in my presence and defend his Democratic gold brick injunction plank, nor show in what respect the Democratic Party is less a capitalist party or more a labor party than the Republican Party.

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¹ The 1908 Democratic platform reaffirmed a commitment to anti-injunction legislation passed by the US senate in 1896 providing for trial by jury in cases of indirect contempt associated with injunctions. It also declared that “the parties to all judicial proceeding should be treated with rigid impartiality, and that injunctions should not be issued in any cases in which injunctions would not issue if no industrial dispute were involved.” It further promised to defend the right to workers to “organize for the protection of wages and the improvement of labor conditions” and that such activity “should not be regarded as illegal combinations in restraint of trade.

² In advocating for the adoption of an anti-injunction plank by the Democratic Party at its July 1908 national convention in Denver, American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers stated “We do not ask for special privileges, but merely for justice and equality. We insist that the injunction not be made an instrument of oppression.” Adopted over the objection of the Democratic Party’s conservative wing, headed by the party’s 1904 presidential nominee, judge Alton B. Parker, the plank was a clear bid to win the support of organized labor for the 1908 Democratic ticket headed by William Jennings Bryan.

³ August Belmont, Jr. (1853-1924) was a wealthy financier and Democratic Party kingpin best known as head of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company and financier of construction of the New York City subway system.